stories & lies: notes for conversations about politics
uncovering the understandings, attitudes, investments and excuses
that underlie our political choices

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§ **REFERENCES**

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§ **The ideological underlay.**

Government, any government, is tyranny. Obama is a socialist. Immigrants are OK except the ones who come here illegally.

It's almost as nonsensical to dispute these propositions as the statements are themselves, though now and then I do still try. They are the kind of superficial formulae we adopt to justify the actions we've chosen for other reasons, and no amount of information is going to change how we think and act unless it addresses the underlying assumptions, reactions and frames of reference.

Let me give an example. Right after President Trump announced his sabotage of the Paris Accord on climate change, one writer noted the President had plenty of support from Christians, and attributed that to their confidence that God will take care of us no matter what (Vox 6-2-17). This is nonsense. Christians are not so indolent about abortion, or school textbooks, or sex policy. Why don't they instead take to heart Jesus' admonition to be good stewards? Of course the President, being his own Messiah, can't be accused of putting it all in the other God's hands. If there's any causal connection at all between Jesus and climate denial, it's only that having an excuse ready to (tiny) hand makes it a little easier for us to do what we want to do anyway.

Plenty of yups, if they don't exactly deny climate change, see no urgency. Instead of relying on divine intervention, though, they pray for machina ex machina, some technological miracle that will scrub the planet of excess greenhouse gases before the current mass extinction runs its course. Either way, the motives are largely the same: it's just too hard to face up to the reality that tens of millions of people will lose their homes in the next couple generations, and the rest of us will be shelling out trillions to cover the damages. If we get bogged down contesting the surface rationales, we'll miss the chance to address the real sources of our problems, and of our responses.

Another example occurs to me, one that we might keep in mind as we fight these culture wars. Not far from where I live Dayton, Tennessee was the site of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1924, and the debate Clarence Darrow had with William Jennings Bryan over teaching evolution in the schools. In the mainstream retelling, Bryan made a fool of himself and made his religion seem foolish, while any up-to-date person can see the plain truth of biological evolution. Putting aside the fact that many Christians think Christians won this debate, what interests me most is the origin of Bryan's fierce opposition to the idea of evolution. How did this silver-tongued politician, who had campaigned for decades to defend farmers and workers against the Robber Barons, end up fighting one of the greatest discoveries of all time?

I was surprised to learn that Bryan came to hate the idea of evolution at least as much because of its association with capitalist and racist misinterpretation and glorification of "survival of the fittest," as from Zebediah's condemnation of evolution in verse 9. Remember, this was the time

when empire-builders reworked Darwin to justify their rapes and murders as simply the outcome of natural law. Bryan wanted desperately to challenge that excuse.

Well, we weren't there, so I guess we have an excuse to forget what evolution meant to a lot of its antagonists. But there's really no excuse for any of us to chuckle along with contemporary observer Mencken when he called Christians stupid and many worse names-- the equivalent a hundred years ago of H.R. Clinton's "deplorables". What is stupid is for anyone interested in the democratic project to so easily write off millions of our neighbors.

Contempt can feel very satisfying. If we want to get beyond that, though-- if we really want to understand what's going on with other folks-- we have to dig deep, because we don't often see the foundational understandings, the models of the way the world works, on which our neighbors base their actions. We may not fully comprehend our own.

Beneath our conscious ideas and rationalizations lies another layer of unarticulated reaction, generated by training, role models, experience, ambient culture, and our positions in the various systems and continua of status and power. Together these shape the behavior which we then try to explain. Researchers have found that our politics correlates to some degree with personality traits such as risk aversion and the need for certainty, but also to the explanations available to us for those feelings-- which is why churches, schools and community organizations are so important.

I wonder too if there's an additional physiological dimension to our political behavior-- not just personal variation in how our brains are wired, but also the physical stimuli that accompany our social and political interactions. Perhaps communities can be traumatized, as individuals are, by warfare, economic violence and environmental disaster, and perhaps that in turn affects how they respond to challenges politically. Maybe we get some kind of dopamine high when we wallow in anger and hatred online. Or is there something addicting about the fight-or-flight arousal we get from some online interactions? We know violence can be fun, not just to watch but to afflict, and our new telecomm environment allows us to indulge quite safely in verbal aggression (safe for individual trolls, not so much for democracy). Certainly many media companies and individuals have made a science of hard-to-resist provocation, and make a lot of money from it.

All these elements of thought, belief, self-interest and emotional response interact in complicated ways. A lot been written about the folks who won the 2016 election for President Trump-- largely older white people, largely abandoned by the elites of both parties, fast losing their paltry privileges of race and gender, many of them living in rural communities hollowed out by automation, outsourcing, drug abuse and the collapse of local businesses, hospitals and social services. Since long before that election Faludi, Folbre, Barber, Riesebrodt and many others have examined this rolling disaster. But some folks facing the same challenges voted for the black yuppie in 2008, others voted for the orange billionaire in 2016, and some voted for both. So **it's not just circumstance and raw data that dictate our choices. It's also what's in our heads-- the frames we use to understand what's going on.** That's what I want to get at here.

Our ideas about the world are important politically because democracy is not about voting once every couple years. Far more, it's about solving shared problems together. That doesn't work when we don't understand each other. Democracy takes talk, but how can we govern ourselves when we are speaking or yelling over each others' heads? For over a century democrats have lamented that people who should be our allies often see things very differently. "False consciousness" is one label for the fact that many of our neighbors disagree with us, but aside from

reassuring us of our own true consciousness --"woke", in the latest self-congratulation-- it explains very little. Of course the ruling gangsters train and coerce us to suck up, but what are the varieties of submission, and why is it easier or more imperative for some people than for others?

** **Purpose.** So here I want to explore one dimension of the ideological underlay that separates us, see if we can get a handle on some of the fundamental differences between more and less authoritarian thinking. I want to identify some of the premises and conclusions at the base of our actions, and maybe a little about how we can talk with each other more effectively. I'm going to sketch out models or partial models of how we think the world works, because these make up the framework for our choices. From ancient harvest festivals to Marx's promise of the inevitable triumph of the proletariat, they tell us what we can expect from each other and our environment. Saint Paul didn't like sex, but he had to admit that most people do, and could not forbid it entirely. These understandings of the world are also the foundation of our political expectations, and our political differences.

What I outline here are not fixed categories, but more like points along continua; most people fall somewhere between the poles. Moreover, these various threads of ideology intertwine and overlap, and certain themes repeat from one complex of ideas to another. Probably few of us are entirely consistent in our views-- but then neither are the physicists. This is a good thing, since the world will always be bigger than our understanding, and we need to look at it from many viewpoints.

For my data set I draw on lots of reading and conversation with folks over many years, including people not much like me.

My goal is not to change the minds of the powerful who prosper from war and economic crisis. Their motives are transparent. If sometimes they show some consideration for the larger community, that's a rare phenomenon and nothing we can count on. Rather, I want to further the discussion about what it is that divides the great majority of us who face similar challenges and should be helping each other.

It's not just this proto-fascist moment that makes me think this is an urgent project. I am just as disturbed that some who claim to champion democracy and justice find it easy dismiss the tens of millions of our neighbors as irrational, irredeemable "deplorables," and as content as the rightists to huddle only with their ideological clones. I don't see how folks reconcile democratic goals with such contemptuous, self-isolating, and self-defeating behavior.

** **Perils.** Before going any further, let me acknowledge the pitfalls of this kind of task. It's a dicey proposition, trying to decipher how other folks are thinking-- not least because we are full of contradictions, and not always sure of our own motives. As a straight old white guy in the USA, richer than 90% of my fellow travelers on this planet, I am limited by experience and the comfort of my privileged position. Often I don't understand my neighbors. So my characterizations here will be partial at best, because of my own ignorance, and also because the subject is inherently messy, tangled and constantly evolving. I don't understand quantum physics, either, but if it's true that observation affects the outcome, that is even more true for human behavior.

Observations about us carry the seeds of their own obsolescence, because we constantly learn and change. Indeed, my intent with this essay is to give us a good shove.

No two ways about it: trying to infer what goes on in other people's heads, beyond what they tell us, is presumptuous in the extreme. Not long ago I read *The Power and the Glory,* David Yallop's hatchet job on the Vatican. He quotes popes and prelates pontificating about women. They are shamefully ignorant. I don't like to display my own shameful ignorance.

Gonna do it anyway. I think it's important to try to get beyond the lies and rationalizations which mask us and shelter us and separate us from each other. How can we work together if we don't understand each other? I read once that our big brains may have evolved to understand each other's motives and plans so that we can cooperate effectively and survive longer. So let's try it. Let's see if we can lift a corner of the curtain. If I can kick off a conversation that more knowledgeable folks would be willing to join, this might turn out to be useful.

**** Fear and failure lie at the heart of the authoritarian response.**

I should also address up front a common view about folks at the authoritarian end of the political spectrum. Every so often we see a new study claiming that right-wing people are more anxious or fearful than their more democratic neighbors. The implication is that scared people are more disposed toward authoritarian leaders and solutions.

I don't buy it. The ground is shifting beneath all of us. We see the cracks spread in the institutions that we depend on; we see them totter with every new crisis. Left-wingers no less than rightists have plenty of worries, and shout about them. It's just that we see problems differently, or see different problems, which are no less deeply felt.

For a segment of the right wing, however, I think there is one way their world is indeed more frightening than mine. I hypothesize that authoritarian people tend to feel more helpless because they are more likely to have a poor understanding of institutions, society, people and the rest of nature. What this means is that there are some challenges they can't meet very well, and fail time and again to protect their families and communities from gangsterism and corporate capitalism. It's tempting to blame personal greed and disloyalty (really, human nature) rather than system failures; name the wrong enemies; and demonize the most vulnerable, those least able to fight back. Washed this way and that by forces they barely understand, they are thrown back on ideologies --really barely more than wishful thinking-- emphasizing control, moral order, and the fragile refuge of clientalism.

If this sounds like an echo of Obama's much-resented comment that rightists "cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them,"[1] it is that, and more. I suggest further that bad ideas make things worse. One common response to the frequent crises caused in part by our own misunderstandings is further rigidity, initiating a spiral of failure. Just as an example, consider men who have been taught to mistreat women. They may experience lots of failed

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[1] Lyndon Johnson said much the same decades ago: "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."--Isenberg 7-1-16. Takes no special acuity to notice this commonplace of our society.

relationships, which they blame on women, leading to continued failure with women and the wider world. (See also Emba 11-14-18, and Hesse 1-13-19.)

You may know people who can't get along with their own kids, or who are never going to get far in their careers, despite their technical skills, or whose main form of communication is trolling the 'net-- people who make the same mistakes over and over. Violence and the threat of violence are common features of chaotic lives; we try to force others to get in line, and usually (not always) make things worse. When our ideologies fail to help solve challenges, and at the same time are perfectly designed to help us rationalize failure, they become a powerful social force. And while folks might not appreciate Obama's loaded word "cling", when we see folks persist with choices that measurably harm them, while expressing great anxiety and anguish, it's hard to see these as anything other than acts of desperation. We feel as well very intense feelings of betrayal; the world is not what we expected, and counted on, and worked for; and we are highly motivated to find someone to punish.

(What is it yuppies cling to? Self-righteousness, sure, but that is not peculiar to my class. For myself, what comes to mind is that, until I got old, I always had the sense that, no matter how lousy things got, I could always find another formula to apply, another resource to tap, another way out.)

I think it would be hard to test this claim of spiralling failure. I'm not sure how you'd quantify failure and pinpoint authoritarian strategies among many possible factors. If I live in a gangster neighborhood, getting a gun would not be bizarre. If my religion mandates circumcision, the social benefits may outweigh the lifelong physical harm. If my boyfriend credibly threatens to kill me if I leave, it's hard to call staying a failed strategy. We could ask folks about their successes and disappointments, but self-reporting is not very reliable. Even very angry and frustrated people hold jobs, raise kids, write essays.

Individual case studies might provide some insight. Do we keep making the same mistakes? Who do we blame for problems, and are there other choices available to us?

§ <u>Contrasting models of the world</u>.

Below I have typed some contrasting statements about the way the world works. In no way can I represent the full, complex, interactive assembly of one or another world views, but I think these statements do represent in a simplified way how many folks think about or react to challenges.

Understanding what we expect from the world is very important to understanding our politics. Our world is a scary place for everyone, I think, as well as sometimes beautiful. From the skills we learn and the lies we are told, we all have a sense of what it takes to make our way and get what we want, what's possible and what is out of reach, and these strongly determine our political choices.

**** Natural processes.**

The world is a scary place. For some of us, it is also impenetrably mysterious.

How we live in the world:

● The world is foul, wicked, corrupt, treacherous, full of sickness and death. We are imprisoned by time and the flesh. Our own bodies betray us. We were made for better things. Here we are in exile./
● We are natural beings, inseparable from the world around us. For all its limits and frustrations, this is our home.

We can expand this out a bit. **How we respond to the world:**
● We despise the world-- ignore it./
● Nature is the enemy, subdue it. It is in the way, bulldoze it./
● Nature is a mess, fix it./
● Nature is a bottomless toybox, plunder it./
● Nature is our only home, take care of it.

For most of history, life has been pretty miserable for most people: cycles of famine, pestilence, warfare, infant mortality, fleas, toothaches, and skin disease interrupted now and then by episodes of peace, youth, music, lust. We can infer from the the few remaining forager bands that life for our remote ancestors might have been less stressful and more joyful. But at least since we invented agriculture, up until very recently, suffering has been almost the daily experience for most people, and nature not so lovable.

So we can see how many take solace in the idea that there is a perfect and unchanging world more real than the one we experience now; more pure and holy. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and dragged thousands of survivors off to Babylon, he sparked a religious revival among Jews --not those left behind, but those in exile-- and helped change Judaism itself into a religion of exile, forever looking to return to an idealized homeland. In Christian, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the world itself and our attachment to it, our very bodies, become something to despise-- nothing but chains holding us back from that more perfect existence. "If any man love the world," the Good Book tells us, God does not love him. Call it the abstinence-only approach to life.

In practice, most folks are not so disdainful of the world. Certainly, we who are well off don't hesitate to enjoy our good fortune, while counseling the sick and hungry to look to eternity. Sometimes we tell them that our own wealth has no meaning in the great scheme of things, and that we ourselves barely think about it at all. For many of us renouncing the world is the fallback position, for when we get in trouble and don't know what else to do. But when lots of people get in trouble, and we tell each other there's no point to looking for worldly solutions, then of course it's much less likely we'll find them.

A second set of ideas, nature as both loot and latrine, dominates our ideas and policies. Our entire political economy depends on continuous economic growth, fed by ever more frantic consumption of resources. That is, as the population explodes, and since the 0.1% continue to increase their share of the world's wealth, the only way to dampen conflict is to keep baking bigger and bigger pies, in order that the rest of us continue to get some crumbs. Even though they may not believe it, corporados have to say GNP must increase, consumers must buy more stuff, and our air, land and water can infinitely absorb the poisons we pour into them. For thousands of years, as our ancestors explored new lands and new technologies, we could rejoice in abundance,

like rats colonizing a new island. We continue to act as if anything we break we can replace with an order to Amazon, that mighty river of stuff. We don't dare admit the physical limits of global consumption, because then we'd actually have to sit down and figure out how to share what we have.

Here we find the true source of the corporate-Christian co-dependence. Since God's bounty is infinite, we needn't worry about taking care of our homes. He will provide as He wills. Along the fringes of U.S. Christianity there are environmentalists who call for stewardship of nature, but they have to be very creative to find anything in the tradition to support this. Abraham's pastoral economy values maximizing herd size (and one's family) above all. Jesus' parable of the talents condemns subordinates who do not maximize profit for investors. Of all the values expressed in religious tradition, the billionaires have elevated those most supportive of their enterprises, remaking religion itself.

A compatible view suggests that nature is a sad failure, and we are here to fix it. With climate change and mass extinction both well underway (really just a clever hoax by the Chinese and their stooges in the Sierra Club), the endless growth strategy requires a kind of cargo cult techno-fantasy that we needn't find political solutions to our problems because, whatever ails us, some miracle cure will fall from the sky. Don't worry! Someone someday will figure out how to build seawalls around every continent and island; "sequester" the massive increase in carbon dioxide somewhere it won't kill us; store nuclear waste safely for tens of thousands of years; raise children online; flee to Mars; etc. etc.

Or maybe none of this matters. Remember James Watt, Reagan's brutal Secretary of the Interior? He assured us it's OK to trash the planet, since we won't be needing it any more; the Lord is on His way. Soon we'll all translate into heaven or the other place, far beyond our earthly woes.

Then there's the aesthetic approach. In the U.S.A. a hundred million suburban lawns, green deserts, the pride and weekend hobby of their owners, armed with garages-full of rakes and mowers and bags of pesticide, assisted by ill-paid crews of persecuted immigrants; Eden for every family. Across the ocean Japanese make exquisite art of sand and rocks, while literally paving their rivers.

The whole justification for capitalism is that it allocates resources efficiently. Nature, of course, being witless, is also very inefficient. After billions of years of evolutionary adaptation, nature is still a sorry mess-- hundreds of thousands of gene sequences, mostly inactive; septillions of eggs and sperm, most of which will not germinate; truly inconceivable amounts of energy, radiating into the vacuum; etc. Clearly the Intelligent Designer could use a couple engineering classes. Fortunately, we human beans have come along to fix these deficiencies. We will run nature like a business. It will be so much better.

One feature of natural "inefficiency" is redundancy. People and plants have extras of almost everything, in order to meet a very wide range of challenges. Our o-so-efficient devised systems, from the electric grid to antibiotics use, are also much more fragile and vulnerable to disruption. We are rediscovering now that destroying the resource base imperils our own existence. There have been ecological crises before but not since the Ice Ages on so grand a scale. For the first time in a couple million years, we can't just pack up and start over somewhere else. So, as with

anything suddenly made scarce, some of us begin to appreciate what's left of the natural treasures of the only planet we have-- this time not as something ornamental, but fundamental.

How we understand the world:

● The world is at best a pale reflection of a higher reality, and we read it as if deciphering an allegory, so that we can transcend it./

● The world is mysterious and threatening. We are at the mercy of malicious forces we don't understand, and we rely on Authority, divine or expert, to make sense of it all./

● We need to understand the world to make our lives better, and there are well-established tools we can all use to do it.

One of the charms of medieval churches is the world of light depicted in the stained-glass windows, a realm more beautiful and real than our own. To many of us still the day's headlines are nothing more than the working out of the Book of Revelations, or the cosmic dance, or simply a distraction from union with the All. On such a reading the main purpose of of life in this world is to show us how to leave it behind, like fairy-tale characters following breadcrumbs in a dark forest; and we find the way by reading pigeon entrails, cracks in the sidewalk, and the gathering of armies at Megiddo.

For some of us, the natural world is bewildering, full of random threats the more frightening for being unfathomable. To avoid complete terror at the mystery of the world, we fill it with intent, imputing purpose to lightning, illness, and of course flood; we see the trickster Crow, the chariot of the sun and One World Government. From our individual perspective, whatever happens to us must be intentional, the work of loving or malevolent beings.

It does not help us solve our problems, however, to suppose that Zika virus or polluting corporations target us personally. The problem is not that some old white guy on the board at J.P. Morgan wants me dead, but rather that bank policies kill lots of people on the way to adding another few thousand square feet to the bankers' vacation cottages.

Oddly, folks who proclaim, There is a reason for everything --usually after something terrible happens-- rarely have a clue as to what that reason might be. They are saying they hope there is some explanation, some justification, but they have no idea what it could be.

Meaningless suffering seems especially intolerable, so sometimes we reassure ourselves that hardship builds character, when from everything we know it just makes us more timid, fearful, controlling and ungenerous. Mostly we can discern these reasons only in hindsight. That way they serve us as perfect rationalizations after the fact. We tell ourselves that what we end up with is what God intended all along.

A different approach presumes that the world is intelligible without being intelligent, that it's we who have to be intelligent. Plants grow toward the light without consciousness or goal. Nature has no purpose, and the only meaning in our lives is what we give them. It's up to us to understand our surroundings, our needs and our limitations, and choose how we want to live. Politicians who claim that nature "wants" us to do something --to fuck certain people or enslave certain people, for example-- are liars.

Whether we feel at home in the world or in exile, whether we see it as sinful or nurturing, deeply affects our politics. Can we make the world a better place? Should we even bother?

Stability and change:

● Natural and human systems are robust and reliable, a steady stage set for our daily dramas. Changes are incremental and linear, predictable and easily manageable. We can go about our business and let the specialists take care of rare anomalies./

● Our systems are resilient but need to be cared for. It's easy to disrupt fragile balances, causing runaway changes, with unintended and to some extent unforeseeable consequences.

● Armagedon, nuclear war, immigrants and zombies will soon destroy civilization. Women will seek out men with cellars stocked with gold and guns. Sissies won't make it.

Remember the Y2K end-of-millenium computer scare? Some people predicted that, since older operating systems didn't know how to register dates from January 2000, systems around the world would crash, banks would close, airplanes would fall from the sky. I remember buying extra peanut butter, and filling plastic milk jugs with water.

A friend of mine was scornful, seeing the predictions as of a piece with survivalist fantasies of heroic he-man action in an apocalyptic landscape. He could scarcely imagine the world not going on much as it has all his life. He was busy, and didn't want to think of much worse scenarios except as entertainment-- comic books and silly films. Because, what would we do then? Makes our lives so much simpler if we can go about our daily business, eating and shitting and fucking and fighting, without having to worry about exhausting or crashing the natural and social systems we depend on.

In the event, no planes or banks crashed that first day of the new millenium. I didn't have to defend my peanut butter against the zombie horde. But we saw plenty of disruptions before Y2K, and have seen plenty since-- shortages and soaring prices, collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of industrial Asia, terrorism, the global financial crisis, flood and drought, Ebola outbreaks, more creeps with nuclear weapons . . . . On the screens we see some of the results: endless streams of refugees fleeing shattered cities. Some suggest that, because our financial, military, and energy systems are now completely dependent on easily hackable software, we are more vulnerable than ever to catastrophic system failure.

And it's not just physical systems that can fail. Millions of us have lost trust --if we ever had it-- in courts, Congress, presidents and police, medicine and the news media. Rightists lament the loss of our moral compass, and yearn for the days of legalized racism, silenced women, and teachers leading classroom prayers. Some people, left and right, work very hard to deny the very existence of these crises, as with the increasingly frantic and violent legions of COVID deniers.

Many scared people go fascist because they want big daddy to protect them, and some go fascist in order to maintain the illusion that nothing's wrong, that God is still in His heaven and the eternal verities and hierarchies shall never founder. In Russia, they called the folks Old Believers who refused to accept reform, even under persecution. Some Roman Catholics in France demand a return to the Latin Mass; slight changes in ritual to make it more accessible shake the foundations of their belief. Western churchmen fought tooth and nail against the ideas of a

heliocentric solar system, deep-time geology and Darwinian evolution; the idea of a changing universe not centered on men terrified them. Today many folks freak out at pandemics and accelerating climate change, even though it's ever more difficult to deny them, and even if they have not yet experienced physical harm, because these crises signal the fragility of our circumstances, our helplessness, and our responsibility. After 1990 many people in Russia and eastern Europe, stunned by the swift collapse of the Soviet regime and religion, yearn for the good ol days of Stalin. These are all desperately authoritarian responses.

> After some deliberation, [Miguel] Nunez recalled, he decided to vote for Trump—not because he liked the Republican nominee, but because he recoiled at what he considered to be hyperbole deployed against him. "Honestly, I was tired of hearing people freaking out about how everything would go to hell if Trump won. I had all these friends super-worried about Trump coming after them, picking on their communities, making life hard on them," Nunez said. "I believed they were wrong. I wanted them to be wrong. But they weren't" (Alberta 10-15-20).

I've heard people say the same thing. Relax, they say. Don't harsh my vibe. It can't get that bad.

As Klein points out, the corporados use the shock of these crises to move agendas that most of us hate because they hurt us. A big part of that agenda is to squeeze the last bit of use from existing resources and infrastructure because the benefits from renewal and repair are too widely distributed; hard to cash in. It's an old, old trick: emergencies make us desperate, and easier to bamboozle.

Perhaps we are still capable of shock because our systems can seem to putter along even as they are going off the rails. Who pays attention to the clanks and grindings that we hear now and then, until our bodies hurtle against glass and steel? Some writers have made careers by proclaiming that no one can predict these failures, these "black swans", but we have known about feedback loops and tipping points for decades. Some feedback loops look like self-regulating cycles, restoring equilibria, while others spiral out of control. An example of the former: An unusually favorable growing season --> lots of food available --> population explosion --> we gobble up all the food --> farm output regresses to the mean --> population crash --> more food available --> --> (thank you Rev. Malthus). In scenarios like this we may suffer but we usually return to something like the initial condition. Much of economic theory presumes that we operate in a closed system.

On the other hand, we can get self-intensifying processes, as with climate change: we burn more fossil fuels --> CO2 levels rise --> average temperatures rise --> icecap shrinks --> less heat is reflected from the surface --> temps increase --> we burn more fuel to run the AC --> icecap disappears --> sea levels rise, resource wars intensify, et cetera et cetera. The oceans soak up some of the extra CO2, killing off the reefs but maybe slowing the greenhouse effect. Then, a tipping point-- the ocean is saturated and atmospheric CO2 soars again. Warming temps release immense reserves of methane frozen for millenia in the Arctic tundra, spiking atmospheric CO2 even more. At some point the Gulf Stream sputters to a halt, Europe goes into deep freeze, and burns more fossil fuels to survive-- unless, of course, Putin cuts off their supply.

Likewise, the financial meltdown of 2007-8 was highly predictable and was indeed predicted by several short-sellers-- they didn't know when the bubble would burst, but they bet on it and won

hundreds of millions of dollars. Once the dominoes started to fall, no one knew whether the global financial system could be rescued.

Rabbits to Australia, kudzu to the USA, burning the forest for farm or pasture, overgrazing arid lands-- sometimes our bright ideas bring new conditions, and we can never go back to the old. Political decisions likewise can spiral out of control, as with Halliburton's invasion of Iraq.

It's true we cannot yet know exactly how climate change will play out. There are too many variables. We do know of massive, very swift climate changes in the past. The question is, do we take action now against probable hazards, or wait til we're sure because they have already irreversibly happened? I see the tornado coming. Hmmmmm. Should I climb down into that stinky ol tornado shelter? Maybe it will blow over.

I guess what you'd call the ultimate threshold effect is when we wipe out entire ecosystems for a million years. Mass extinction is not something you can walk back, not with all the gene labs in the world.

**** People.**

Here are some statements about **who we are:**

● We are not animals. We are divinely designed for divine purposes, and we can best understand ourselves only in reference to our true calling./

● We are natural beings with needs and limitations like every other living thing. To meet those needs and succeed despite those limitations we have to understand ourselves and each other.

In my culture the hope of rising toward godhead derives from both the Christian ideas of salvation and the soul, and the neo-Platonist notion of continuous ascent toward the divine (Pico, Ficino et al). Such an ambition seems like an exalted view of our cosmic role and potential, but in fact is very pessimistic, explaining our limitations as sin or stain, and the solution to our problems as the inscrutable grace or whim of the Almighty, and the relentless purging ourselves of our humanity. We see our mistakes, miscalculations and just plain bad luck as moral failure, disobedience, straying from the path that has been set for us. If a part of us is heaven-bound, the rest is bestial, and we have to shed that to save ourselves. Desire is slavery, and we free ourselves through self-control. What is it Jesus tells us? If your right eye offends you, pluck it out; if your right hand offends you, chop it off, lest your whole person go to hell.

Others of us figure we need our eyes and hands, thank you very much. They help us get along in this world-- the only one we have. There is no "I" separate from my body.

● Each of us has a distinct, eternal essence./

● We are protean, adaptable creatures shaped by our environment./

● We have no meaningful identity separate from our community.

Writing in the context of factory layoffs and job searches, Metzgar explains how class correlates with how we identify:

> One of our best qualities as middle-class professionals is that we never think of ourselves as completed, as fixed entities with no further potential. We know that

> life has stages-- that we are always developing, changing, becoming something we are not yet. We are more ready than other classes to believe that we can and should transform ourselves. . . . But working class culture emphasizes being and belonging, not achieving and becoming. . . . The hard part was the idea that you could and should transform yourself. Most steelworkers did not want to transform themselves, even if they thought they could. Even worse, it seemed like a bad strategy, unnatural, to try to eliminate the weaknesses rather than to fit into a situation where your weaknesses are simply accepted because they could be offset by others' strengths, just as your strengths helped offset others' weaknesses. Even if you could eliminate your deficiencies, you would have to define yourself as self-sufficient, a fundamental error that inevitably leads to both loneliness and an inability to be honest with yourself. . . . The working-class sense of immutable personal insufficiency —and the need for others that results— is both the principal strength and the primary weakness of that culture (2000, pp. 203-4).

Where we stand in relation to these statements affects the choices available to us, such as how much we invest in our community, and how well we can survive its destruction.

Our purpose:

● We are moral agents in the world. We serve a purpose greater than ourselves./

● We are embedded in and products of the physical, cultural and socioeconomic context. We are beset by many competing desires, not all of which we can satisfy. We choose mostly according to how we judge our self-interest in particular circumstances. Our only goals are what we choose for ourselves.

The choices we face:

● We have a clear sense of right and wrong. For the big decisions, we can rely on Authority to guide us. What matters above all is to have faith./

● There are many possible paths, and rarely do we have complete information about any of them. Our understanding of our options also affects how we judge other people.

The questions we seek to answer:

● Do I have the strength of character to follow the right path?/

● What are my goals? How do I prioritize? How can I come closest to achieving them?

Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke,
You gotta understand,
It's just our bringin' up-ke
That gets us out of hand.
Our mothers all are junkies,
Our fathers all are drunks.
Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks!

. . . Dear kindly Judge, your Honor,
My parents treat me rough.
With all their marijuana,
They won't give me a puff.
They didn't wanna have me,
But somehow I was had.
Leapin' lizards! That's why I'm so bad!

. . . Officer Krupke, you've done it again.
This boy don't need a job, he needs a year in the pen.
It ain't just a question of misunderstood;
Deep down inside him, he's no good!

One set of ideas expresses a clear distinction between folks who do the right thing and those who choose to do evil. When moralists acknowledge the social and cultural factors even a bit, often the recognition comes with a warning: ignore and resist these amoral or immoral forces. In this universe, the problem to be solved is us. And since we are sinners by nature, we cannot solve us except in the tiniest, most temporary way this side of the Second Coming.

A different model suggests that what distinguishes us is not so much the purity of our intent but the constraints of our situations-- the very different schedule of risks and rewards set before each of us. Here the obstacles are mostly external, to be overcome by understanding, strategy and hard work. Even our own weaknesses can be analyzed and managed or circumvented.

Our guardians claim to fear that without a fixed moral compass, the contingent, problem-solving approach will cause chaos and confusion-- the dread "moral relativism" of modern i.e. secular i.e. corrupt society. In fact there are big incentives to act consistently, quite independent of demands imposed by the authorities. The whole point of adaptability and learning from experience is to develop effective approaches to the challenges we face; once we've got a working solution, we are strongly motivated to keep applying it. Consistency is equally important in how we deal with our neighbors-- we strive to act in a predictable way, so that others will know what to expect from us; so they'll trust us and cooperate with us.

While moralists often tell us to ignore the situational quality of our choices, because after all truth is eternal and we are all equal in God's eyes, some of the most privileged among us don't see situation at all. They lament the "irrational" choices of the lower orders. They represent the classic example of being born on third base and assuming they hit a home run.

To me an interesting side effect of the situational approach is our widespread tolerance of the rich. Even for those of us who don't suspect we might be reborn tomorrow with a rich daddy, we think we'd probably act just like a rich person if we were rich ourselves. We see being rich as a matter of having lots of cars and houses, going to lots of parties like they do on TV, rather than the daily routine of bribery and deception, theft and murder. In our field of vision these functions are mostly carried out by very low-level underlings --mean-spirited managers, polluting consumers, racist bullies-- the retail end of global networks of exploitation. The real playuhs are so far removed they glitter like gold at the top of the pyramids.

Very few people are strict moralists, because it's hard to succeed that way. Too many situations we face require responses we won't find in the rule books. The moralists who persist often double-down on their claims, burning or burying contradictory evidence. Such notions are basement growths, not well suited to the light of day, which is also why believers insist on imposing their ideas on the rest of us. It's easier to sustain unwarranted beliefs when all contrary ideas have been supressed. But continued failure to solve real-world problems intensifies the fear that everything will spiral out of control. Moralists demand ever more control, and get less and less-- a kind of mental Syria.

Then there are the folks around us. **We might say about the higher-ups:**

- My boss works harder and is smarter than me. He deserves the big salary.
- The boss isn't any smarter or more hardworking than I am.

- Someday I hope to become a boss.
- I could do what it takes to become a boss, but I wouldn't.

We know good bosses and bad. Either way, we mostly have to put up with them. A functionalist approach might raise questions like, Does the boss make my job easier? Does she expand the firm, and my opportunities?

Some of us have drawn conclusions about the whole category, irrespective of our experience with particular individuals; visceral reactions of contempt, loyalty, or something like admiration. Perhaps it's not the straw boss we like, the guy who tells us what to do, but his boss, the man upstairs, who would fix everything if only he knew how things how screwed up things are on the shop floor.

Some of us believe that we, too, can join the Olympians. All it takes is brains and hard work, and a mass of stupid, slow-moving targets. Look at our President-- from humble beginnings, he pulled himself up by the bootstraps. (Didn't he?-- McDonald et al 1-17-19.) It follows that such smart and hard-working bosses deserve their extra helpings of wealth, health, beauty, sex and power.

Or perhaps all it takes is sincerity. An old guy once described to me the first time he read a Horatio Alger story. "To begin with, there were no books in my house. But somehow, some way, I don't recall now, I got my hands on a Horatio Alger novel. It was the first book I ever read and to this day I believe it profoundly affected me, for better or worse. . . . That story plus many of his other stories had virtually one theme, mainly: the very poor young boy who was kind, considerate, helpful, honest, and brave. One day he encounters a runaway horse and buggy with a fair young damsel in the buggy trying desperately to stop the horse. The boy did it. The girl was the banker's daughter. He was grateful, took a liking to the boy and, in effect, became his patron. . . . This story hit me like a ton of bricks."

In the blue collar culture Metzgar describes, employees may respect individual managers while still fighting steadfastly for better wages and conditions; everyone knows whose side they're on. One interesting result of the Clintonite abandonment of the manufacturing base --and before that, over a century of condescending do-gooderism overlaid on sectional differences-- has been that the

enduring distrust of working class employees for managers has been transferred in large part to distrust of the professional class.

> Joan C. Williams, author of "White Working Class", points out that its members tend to resent professionals with their collections of diplomas but admire the rich. "The dream is not to become upper-middle-class, with its different food, family and friendship patterns," she writes; "the dream is to live in your own class milieu, where you feel comfortable—just with more money." The ideal is to own your own business so you no longer have to take orders from anyone, just like the president (*Economist* 7-1-17).

Perhaps it's not just the independence that attracts us, but also the prospect of being able to boss other people around. It's fun after all to watch people scurrying about, fetching for me. Push people around or get pushed-- for authoritarians, the world contains no other possibilities. We can see the inspirational version in the Gunga Din-Punjab-Pomp & Barney ethnic sidekicks of the old adventure stories, as well as newer made-for-TV Aryan romance movies: the boss surrounded by cheerful, wise, devoted, complaisant employees, who serve for love rather than (the never-mentioned) pay, somehow living middle-class lives on retail wages. Sometimes the entourage includes a wise, wise-cracking older black woman, periodically issuing certificates of approval, and waiving the usual fee. For folks forced to love their abusers and seeing no way to escape, perhaps the idea of switching roles is the most comforting fantasy available.

I write more below about patron-client relationships.

Through our positions in government, media and the universities we in the professional class have been responsible in part for several offenses, from same-sex marriage to the Affordable Care Act, evolution, immigration, and NAFTA. Some of us also promised untold wealth to the tens of millions of laid off industrial workers, if only they would retool themselves as nimble entrepreneurs in the newest new economy. Shall we be surprised to hear that many folks flock to Trump U. for their apprenticeships?

What we might say about our neighbors, people in general, and the possibilities for getting along:

- People are crazy, weak and wicked, unpredictable and unreliable, originally sinful. I don't trust others and can't work with them./
- People are weak, stupid, easily manipulable; suckers./
- We are products of our environment, affected by good and bad experience. We can learn to get along with each other, and have a vested interest in doing so./
- We are naturally good. Predatory behavior is usually the result of previous victimization.

Deadbeats, dishonest lovers, phone-addled drivers and irresponsible dog owners . . . when I wish evil upon my enemies, the gents who pour carcinogens into my water or mark up my meds 1000% are not the first that come to mind. Rather, it's family, neighbors and co-workers who at times make my life miserable in immediate and inescapable ways. They should know better, but they

mess up, and I get so mad I can't even speak to them. They are stubborn, stupid, ignorant and insensitive. I've tried everything, really I have, and they don't seem to care. I'm tempted to wash my hands of the whole lot. As for the wackos who live on the other side of the tracks, or the other side of the world, I wouldn't piss on 'm if they was on fire.

When we can't understand each other --especially people with very different experience-- by default we must interpret actions we don't like as crazy or malicious. Think of a hundred mad bombers in the movies, innocent of backstory, their motivations represented solely by their foreign accents. I think of all the people I know who vote for candidates and policies that I despise; are these people stupid or what?

Add to this the idea that we are born evil, traitors to God, and helpless to save ourselves except through God's grace. We expect addiction, backsliding, shirking responsibility. Begging forgiveness becomes a central ritual binding the community. Add to this encounters with selfish, self-important jerks with money, guns, bureaucratic authority and digital pulpits. Factor in intense competition among millions displaced and traumatized by the gangsters who run our planet. No wonder when we need help so many of us turn our eyes heavenward instead of to our fellows.

Each bullet point above implies ways to deal with people. Folks who feel their neighbors are crazy and unpredictable feel almost helpless to influence them except by coercion. When we feel other people are contemptibly stupid and easy to manipulate, we are likely to regard them as prey. Records of conversations in Mafia bars, Wall Street offices or Nixon's White House offer good examples of this kind of arrogant manipulator.

It may be the single unifying element among the diversity of U.S. fascists, men and women, Christian and otherwise: the shared conviction that I am light-years better than the people around me, but they refuse recognize my genius and sex appeal. I'll show them! Unlike the the craven sheeplike masses around him, this "independent thinker" has courageously thrown off the shackles of the tired, old, oppressive superstitions of race and gender equality, and of the patently unfair expectation that we back up our claims with evidence. He is going to "own the libs," make them pay for their disrespect. Thus the herd of "independent thinkers" indulge their slavish commitment to their fellow genius the fascist Fuehrer.

The authoritarian model is: dominate or submit.

Four hundred years ago some writers posed a different model of human nature, suggesting that we are profoundly shaped by our experience from childhood on, that policy and practice affect our ability to live productive lives in harmony with our neighbors. Looking back, we call their work the Enlightenment.

Now this idea can be hard to accept, because it means that we ourselves are profoundly affected by what's around us. Instead of heroic monuments defying the elements, immovable, untarnished, forever unchanged --motionless, rigid, frozen-- perhaps we are just part of landscape, changing with the seasons. Some people find such connectedness comforting. If we become more forgiving of our neighbors, less quick to judge, then maybe we can give ourselves a break, too. But that would mean giving up a bit of the moral superiority that says there is something intrinsically more honest and brave about me, regardless of circumstance. I got where I am today by my hard

work and sacrifice; if others don't measure up it's their own fault. I surmounted all obstacles, and permit no one else to use poverty, ignorance or oppression as excuses for their shortcomings.

I read that some cultures leave a lot more room for explanations based on situation, and lots of research supports the corollary of mutual understanding and cooperation. Recent explorations of evolutionary altruism suggest that, in addition to the biological bases for aggression and competition, many species including our own also are wired to cooperate, because in some circumstances individuals benefit by the success of the group. In fact we combine competition and cooperation with practiced ease; what else are armies and corporations?

The fourth proposition is similar to the third, except that it discounts the rational incentives to robbery and murder. We always benefit from our crimes, or intend to; we don't need a history of personal trauma to explain them. Neither of these more hopeful formulae help us distinguish between benevolent behavior and the crimes we find it easy to reclassify as service in the great cause-- religious war, industrial pollution, hedge funds, dll.

The democratic idea includes: We are all in this together; we do better when we cooperate, pooling our knowledge and other resources; we all have the capacity to understand our common interests and how to work together.

**** Institutions and social processes.**

Many of the processes that shape our culture and society are about as visible to us as air, or water to a fish. What we do notice we tend to take for granted-- voting booths, ethnic identity, language, marriage, tap water, corporations, Christmas, the NFL. At one time young people of the professional class were exposed to the social sciences in college and got a glimpse of our society as if seen from the outside, but such knowledge is hard to monetize, and fewer and fewer of us get that exposure. We still see romance between people from different sides of the tracks. Even so, it can be hard to see the contingent and plastic nature of familiar and cherished practices and institutions-- how we got to where we are, and how our situation compares with other times and places. We are not always aware how our own communities and organizations really work. So when problems arise, seemingly out of nowhere, we are hard put to address them.

Just as a for-instance: Apparently some of us believed the promoter of Trump University when he said he would abolish the Affordable Care Act health insurance system and replace it with something better (though not as many believed as *said* they believed). If so, they cannot have known how this particular sausage was made in the first place-- the complex deals and trade-offs, how funding sources got cobbled together and legal hurdles circumvented or overturned. They would have had to understand the GOP proposals as health care bills, when in fact their primary purpose was to cut taxes for the wealthy. They would have had to be blissfully ignorant about health insurance pools, our tax system, technology trends, the economics of medicine, hospitals, and public goods, the power and modus operandi of lobbyists . . . . in short, they would have had to overlook or misunderstand some of the fundamental institutions and social processes of this country. So I think it's fair to say that our knowledge base affects our politics. Below I sketch out a few of the contrasting ways we look at our society and government.

The basis for social order:

We have lots of different ideas about how society is ordered in the first place, e.g.,
● Because people are weak and wicked, order has to be imposed upon us.
● Order arises spontaneously as we compete with one other; some succeed while others fail. Bureaucracy just gets in the way of the inevitable outcome. Leave us alone.
● Order arises spontaneously from our inherently cooperative nature. Most of us are caring, fairminded people. We'll talk out our differences. Rules, conventions and bureaucracies are inherently oppressive. Leave us alone.
● Order arises from organization, as we identify and pursue common interests through shared ventures and understandings. It is in our self-interest to cooperate, but we need skills and a framework for dealing with each other clearly, fairly and inclusively.

Going way back, rich people have always been afraid of maddened mobs of peasants and laborers --the "lower orders"-- who may break in on them at any moment and steal their women and other property. Edmund Burke calls us a "swinish multitude." George Rudé and others describe such insurgents as rather more purposeful, breaking into royal warehouses during famines, for instance, and distributing bread in an orderly way.

A somewhat different category of mass action takes place when political entrepreneurs --Adolf and others we could mention-- not content to wait in line behind more senior bosses, spin off from the gangs they belong to in order to start new ones. They organize violence to draw recruits, collect contributions and intimidate their rivals. Normally these champions win support and demonstrate their capabilities by beating up the most vulnerable in a community-- Jews, immigrants, gay people, women . . . but the threat is there for everyone else: join up or you're next.

Then there are the gangsters and wannabes who loot communities abandoned by the state. The rolling catastrophe in the Middle East slaughters the people who set out so hopefully and heroically in the Arab Spring, millions demanding democracy, peace and justice, now dead or fled, or hiding in the rubble.

At its base the authoritarian policy rests on the calculation that it's cheaper to coerce people than to share with them. And for the politicians, this is mostly true, because they don't pay, or count on not paying the costs of coercion --the gulags, the mass murder, the millions of refugees, the wrecked ecosystems, the surveillance state, the trillions of dollars diverted from food and housing and health care, the sheer incompetence of bosses unleashed from any democratic control, the unraveling of social networks in a land of snitches-- while reaping all the benefits. There's a certain kind of politician always sounding the alarm about the dangers of revolution and disorder, but somehow they never seem to mind the constant and largely arbitrary violence of the authoritarian state, sweeping away ten bystanders for every genuine dissenter, or the "creative destruction" of capitalism.

But authoritarianism is not solely or even mostly an ideology, so it's hard to address on that basis. One likely source of our control-mindedness may be our ten thousand years' experience with farming and herding. Our forebears developed elaborate social controls even as they grew adept at manipulating crops and animals.

Parenting is the inescapably authoritarian experience-- for years, we know better than our kids, and their very survival depends on what we choose for them. But in some cultures parents take a

remarkably hands-off attitude, letting kids negotiate the world's hazards for themselves from a very early age. Always the question is, how can we help them learn to make good choices, and there's no easy formula for that.

Many of us learn our controlling ways at daddy's knee --maybe across his knees-- or on the street or in the workplace. In some jobs and communities there is intense scrutiny and socialization of new members, with heavy demands to meet exacting standards of work, piety, and gender roles. This high degree of social control can be useful, e.g. for people in the war business, or construction, where carelessness can kill you, or the person next to you. A highly controlled community can accumulate a lot of political and economic power, some of which will trickle down to the rank and file.

We may also put up with these heavy demands in the hopes that someday we can knock off dear old dad and take his place, and turn all those demands on others. Then, too, we commonly incur investment bias --having survived getting knocked around, yelled at, treated like children or servants, we conclude the harsh treatment must have had some value-- "made me a man," et cetera.

Others dream of a cheaper paradise. We can dispense with rules and bureaucrats and taxes because of our natural goodness or through the magic of the marketplace. Prosperity and justice, if not equality, will follow naturally if only the politicians and powermongers would get out of the way.

Some of us think it takes more work. A few hundred years ago, when the divine right of kings was looking distinctly shaky, several writers posited that government grows out of an original social contract, whereby people agree to limit some of their liberties in order to keep others. This idea that authority derives from the consent of the governed, however mythical in origin, did eventually get applied in the Declaration of Independence, among other documents. Coupled with that is an acceptance that our own freedom depends on making room for our neighbors. Security comes not so much from walls and police as from lasting relationships and the prosperity of our neighbors. A hundred years ago, John Dewey described something like the fourth proposition as "deliberative democracy" (Schugurensky), where we don't simply vote our druthers but talk with each other to figure out what we want and how to get it, together. And there's a contract --a constitution-- that spells out the expectations we have of each other.

Self-interest and shared interest.

What I mean by self-interest is our assessment of what is to our advantage, materially and emotionally. We all need food and shelter, health care, companionship, respect and a chance to employ our talents. Given our different positions in society and economy, we may see very different paths to meeting those needs. And within these broad categories we may have different priorities.

At first glance, making choices based on what's best for ourselves seems a very shaky foundation for a society. Everyone has different interests, so how can we base a stable society on self-interest? It sounds like selfishness, the opposite of cooperation, and seems to promise endless conflict; Hobbes' "war of all against all," or the "spirit of faction" that the upstarts of 1776 feared

so much. Popes and kings warned that if they lost control, the world would fall into chaos and devastation. They told us only unquestioning obedience could save us.

It's very costly, though, to base order on submission to arbitrary authority, once you factor in lifelong training, surveillance, censorship, policing, inquisition and war. No less than anarchy, authoritarian societies require constant violence.

It was Adam Smith who discerned the Hidden Hand of order in the marketplace, by which many people, each striving for her own self-satisfaction, achieve the maximum possible satisfaction for all. We need no boss but the lash of our own desire.

A simpler view sees that self-interest encompasses cooperation with others; always has, since our primate ancestors picked bugs from each other's fur, and ate them. Fact is --and we know this-- what's good for our group is more often than not good for us as individuals.

Indeed, not so long ago, enlightened self-interest was widely accepted and appreciated as the principal binding force in our polity: "The Americans . . . are fond of explaining almost all the actions of their lives by the principle of interest well understood; they show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist each other, and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the State" (deTocqueville v.2). On this understanding, self-interest is the life and breath of commonwealth. It took generations of preachers and propagandists to beat out of us this value of self-conscious cooperation, and replace it with the glorification of competition, among individuals and groups, on the one hand, and patronizing charity on the other.

"Interest well understood"-- that's the catch, init? Some leftists propose that working class people who are not leftists suffer from false consciousness, a misunderstanding of their true revolutionary interest. But this is not a very helpful idea, because we have so many ways to calculate our self-interest. It's hard enough to figure out the best path for ourselves, ne'mine what others should be doing. We can make use of all the data available from research and personal experience and still not choose the right path, because we cannot predict the future in detail. (Not even the AIs make optimal use of all the information; there's too much, and too much of dubious quality.) And the future gets fuzzier the further we peer into it. Uncertainty rules all our decisions.

Couple examples: I'm old enough to take Social Security, but not so old that I have to. I could start now, and get less every month, or start in a few years, with a higher monthly distribution. Instant gratification v. wait for a better deal. Really, it's a bet on how long I'll live. I lose if I die before I start taking Social Security. If I start now at a low rate, and live a long time, I draw less income than I would have otherwise. Which choice is in my self-interest? It all depends on when or if I'll die, and right now I can't be sure.

How about a political decision? An abused employee can suck up to the boss or try to overthrow them. Either choice carries risks and potential rewards. I myself never tried to overthrow anybody. Under what circumstances would revolution be in my interest?

In trying to understand others' motives, we tend moreover to **focus too much on material benefits,** while overlooking important but hard to measure goals such as acceptance by peers, approval by the boss, prestige, or simply our need to appear to be consistent. How much would you pay to put your name on a hospital, or take back that stupid photo you posted your freshman year? We see over and over again how folks will expend blood and treasure to keep or advance

our place in the status hierarchy. As long as the few at the very peak grab all the good things society has to offer, maintaining status has got to be a key part of our understanding of self-interest.

We also like to live up to our exalted idea of ourselves. Most of us, though, have no trouble at all in inventing excuses for not living up to our high standards. Usually, we just substitute another standard we can say we are following-- stealing and killing are bad, but not if I'm trying to save babies, or the company. We are not surprised to find that God Himself often needs defending. You get the idea. Practice makes perfect.

There's nothing sinister about this. Mostly we're not even aware of it. We just need to look past the public justifications to identify what really drives us.

Then there's our common response to "sunk costs", that seems to bother classical economists so much. When we have expended a lot of time and effort in one investment or one path, we tend to hang on to it long after it stops making our lives better. The economists say this is irrational. What's important is the best place to put our money and hopes now, regardless of past decisions. They say past effort is all water under the bridge, and should be irrelevant to our current decisions. (I think of flipping coins. The fact that you've just come up with tails six times in a row does not change the 50-50 probability on the next toss.) But the people who insist that the rest of us are irrational, that we don't know our own interest, completely miss the heavy cost of feeling bad about failed investments versus the sometimes negligible cost of holding on a little longer in hopes of a big, if delayed, payoff. This is also how we get decades-long wars . . . but in cases like that, the people making the decisions are not the ones who pay the costs.

Note that our tendency to cling to past decisions applies as much to ideological commitments as to wars and financial investments, and our beliefs vastly complicate our calculations of self-interest. We set goals based on our understanding of the world and the possibilities open to us –wealth, respect, survival, salvation-- but when we misunderstand the world, we end up choosing distinctly painful if not outright suicidal pathways (not that we can't rationalize even these).

Our first guide is our image of ourselves and our place in this world-- our adoption and personal adaptation of the dominant ideology in our community. I have a reputation to maintain as a generous patron, irresistable lover, ruthless pirate, trusted ally, unplayable player and implacable enemy. You want to understand me, you best take into account how I understand myself-- however deluded I may be.

Our shared ideologies start with self-interest, too-- first of all the interest of the pundits, priests and politicians who generate and promote them, but including also enough to attract paying customers. As we learn more about the norms of our society, we ask, What's in it for me? The answers are not always obvious.

Let's say you learn you can rob someone with 100% certainty that you won't get caught. The target could be a dying demented person with lots of money and no kin. Some people will go ahead and commit the crime. Others won't, for a couple reasons. One, there is no 100% certainty in this world, except yall gonna die.

Second, as noted above, we are generally more successful over our lifetimes if we find a good set of strategies and stick with them, so we don't have to weigh anew every day the choices before

us, and so that one mistake doesn't jeopardize all our achievements and accumulations. We develop rules of thumb to guide our choices in conditions of uncertainty.

These rules help us reduce the costs of processing information. When I enrolled in Medicare I spent many hours researching the options. Even though plans and costs change over time, I don't want to start from scratch again every year, so I'll most likely stick with the plan I chose first (which is why insurors compete so fiercely to get that first commitment). The doctors, for their part, also follow rules of thumb for treating patients-- based, we hope, on good research. If their patient croaks, these rules protect them against legal liability and also emotional risk; they did what they were supposed to do, the outcome is not their fault. They can make peace with their failures and continue their work.

So another big advantage to these rules of thumb is that they protect us from disappointment. When we follow the rules, whatever the outcome, we can say, I did the best I could. Following the rules also helps us persist through problems, sometimes long enough to solve them, as with romantic relationships. With respect to criminal opportunities as in the scenario above, we can rationalize foregoing them by seeing ourselves as good people incapable of such acts. (These are not my ideas, by the way; lots of others have written about how we make decisions.)

Even demonstrably false ideas can confer benefits on believers. I start coughing blood, I burn some incense before a statue-- it will ease my mind, even when the cough persists. I treat women as helpless handmaids, or act as one myself, the patriarchs will reward me with praise and position.

We should not overlook a related, very important function of ideology, as a set of citizenship papers to belong to a group. In most places we have no claim on group profits and protections unless we salute the local flag, kneel at the local shrine and worship the local hero. So even when we don't believe that raping women is our God-given right --even we are women ourselves-- we might profess the local faith because being cast out from the group is even more dangerous. Thus holding destructive ideas can be in our self-interest, at least in the short term.

Our assessment of self-interest must also vary with the **time horizon** we consider. Should I buy a house now or wait? Should I quit the job and go back to school? Should I partner with this person? These depend on our calculations of risk and reward in the short- and long-term, and given necessarily imperfect information, there is no single best answer. Dare I take that second scoop of ice cream, or should I instead put my pennies in the piggy bank? Addictions and investments, instant gratification versus the safe, low-risk move, and the big payoff, later, maybe. Part of the calculation is that little things add up over time, if we have the time. But we can't wait forever for just the right moment to cash in. As Keynes famously observed, in the long run we are all dead.

Time is a crucial element in relationships, too. Should I rob that guy or go into business with him, or organize with him against the boss? It takes time both to build trust and to realize the benefits.

Asymmetric reciprocity is a feature of most relationships, and a big obstacle to any kind of collective action. Folks in partnership contribute different benefits in different measure. It takes time for those contributions to even out, if they ever do. But so often jealousy gets in the way. He's getting more, it's not fair!

We see how it works in our own families. Junior gets more help with his homework than his sister, or maybe his health problems take more time than his parents can give to his little brother. Sharing a home for years means parents and kids have a good chance to balance contributions and repair conflicts.

We need that kind of long-term perspective as a community. At any given point in time, some people need more help than others. We must always set priorities, allocate resources, and weigh trade-offs. Whenever we ask, Who benefits? we must also ask, Who pays?, and When? Often we have to wait to see any pay-off at all. Our stake in the commonwealth becomes clear only over time.

An alternative strategy is to do lots of favors for people and collect the IOUs, knowing some will never be repaid. But when you need help, you'll always be able to find someone who owes you and can pay. You can even get them to help third parties, thus adding to your social capital--the key to the persistence and success of patron-client networks. This works best within a fairly stable web of relationships, where there are few other stores of capital. People with refrigerators, banks and insurance have less need of friends and family, or powerful patrons. IOU collectors will always find a home in Congress, however.

There's a category of long-term interest that I'm going to call **aspirational**. We don't always accept the schedule of choices we are faced with today. When we don't like the game we're in, we'll take risks and expend resources to change existing conditions, values, and rules. People within sight of the top, with lots of cushion, or people teetering on the precipice are especially likely to challenge the status quo. For the well-satisfied, it makes no sense that someone would risk material loss or gangsters' attentions to reject the immediate options. But our self-interest encompasses more than our choices today; many of us also have in mind what might open to us later if only we did thus-and-such now. Perhaps when we commonly reject deals from which we might profit, but others would unfairly profit by more (Fehr 10-1-02), we are trying to enforce norms of fairness that will benefit us in the long run. Brexit, trade wars, the Bernie Sanders agenda-- these are all examples of folks being willing to take risks for prospects of a better future. The stuff of fascism, or revolution. So "self-interest" is a moving target (and one reason why the social sciences will never attain the notional precision of Newtonian physics.)

Sometimes short-term considerations manifest as the **free rider** problem. Some members of our community take advantage of the commonwealth without contributing anything— people who steal library books and trash the parks, Social Security frauds, tax evaders, and companies that log or graze public lands at a tiny fraction of the real cost, depend on public assistance to feed their low-wage employees, or use our air and water as their free toilet. Probably most of us take a free ride at one time or another. Certainly as children we take far more than we give.

The adults who do this bet that the rest of us will continue to maintain the infrastructure despite these abuses. We continue to fill in the potholes and patch the frayed edges. But the more free riders piggyback on the system, the bigger the burden on the rest of us. We rail against the unfairness, and start to desert. The long-term risk is that so many abandon the commonwealth, its systems falter and grind to a halt. We crash to the level of the other failed states and kleptocracies, all wasteland and brutal competition. Then even free riders lose.

We can consider, too, how our **social service systems,** feeble as they are, affect our decisions. Social Security, health and flood and unemployment insurance, workplace safety regs, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, mortgage and student loan guarantees, housing subsidies, tenant protections, all these help insulate us from worst-case scenarios, and give room for the long-term thinking that allow us to look beyond beggar-thy-neighbor, mortgage-the-future short-term profit-taking. With a modicum of social and economic security, fewer of us rob our neighbors or let bosses rob us just because we are too close to the edge to resist.

These same systems let us mess up good and escape the consequences, at least for now. Millions of people dependent on government programs vote for politicians who promise to smash them-- usually because these programs also benefit people not like them. To an outsider it can look like cutting off their own noses to spite their faces. But these folks don't see it that way. Many don't see the risks to themselves. Robust programs take years to die (and much, much longer to repair or replace). In a society still insulated a bit from the worst of gangster capitalism, it can take years for our mistakes to catch up with us. So we can turn on the stove and walk away, and later tell ourselves it was black people, or gay people, Jews, World Government, the Illuminati, Nancy Pelosi, or tiny moms from Guatemala who burned down the house.

It's perfectly legitimate for Medicaid recipients, for instance, to decide that electing anti-abortion candidates is more important than supporting Medicaid, just as some rich liberals advocate tax increases, even at cost to themselves. What's missing many times is the understanding that there's a cost to our choices, consideration as to how these decisions will affect us down the line, and effective mechanisms to hold each other accountable. Many of us take for granted the systems we depend on, and imagine that somehow they'll always be there, whether we maintain them or not.

In Africa and Asia, invading nomads destroyed centuries-old irrigation systems, turning farmland into desert. Centuries later these places still have not recovered. Ignorant, reckless leaders can do just as much damage just as quickly. President Trump is our great national model for squandering physical, social, and institutional resources that have accumulated over generations without knowing where they come from, through trade wars and other pointless conflicts, and by trashing our Constitution.

Because so few of us talk politics any more except with the like-minded, we have less chance to consider the broader impacts of our political decisions. We have no way to single out program beneficiaries who undermine the programs, nor should we; many of these systems are indivisible, and even those who don't benefit directly do so indirectly. I want kids to learn to read even though I have no kids in public schools-- they'll grow up to be better neighbors and citizens. I'm glad housing and health programs reduce emergency room visits, because I'll need to go there myself some day. But some of us expect to continue depending on these systems without helping with the upkeep. We can do a better job identifying our shared stake and rebuilding our shared commitments.

Bernice Johnson Reagon thinks we need to get beyond self-interest:

> If you analyze the situation properly, you will know that there might be a few things you can do in your personal, individual interest so that you can experience and enjoy the change. But most of the things that you do, if

> you do them right, are for people who live long after you are long forgotten. That will only happen if you give it away. Whatever it is that you know, give it away, and don't give it away only on the horizontal. Don't give it away like that, because they're gonna die when you die, give or take a few days. Give it away that way (up and down). And what I'm talking about is being very concerned with the world you live in, the condition you find yourself in, and be able to do the kind of analysis that says that what you believe in is worthwhile for human beings in general, and in the future, and do everything you can to throw yourself into the next century. And make people contend with your baggage, whatever it is. The only way you can take yourself seriously is if you can throw yourself into the next period beyond your little meager human-body-mouth-talking all the time.

But to me, although they are not identical, personal self-interest is very much bound up with what's good for the community, which encompasses our neighbors and generations before and after us. After food and (maybe) sex, our standing in the community is what's most important to us. Beyond a certain level of obscene overconsumption and anal retentiveness, wealth becomes mainly a means to higher status, which of course has no meaning except in community. We know that our strongest personal security comes from the long-term relationships we cultivate over time; President Trump's transactional con games, cheat 'm and skip town, are totally self-defeating for all but the most emotionally crippled sociopaths. We understand that we have inherited much of the good things we enjoy, and we hope that the good we do lives after us. Si Kahn's "Gone, Gonna Rise Again" says it very well:

> These apple trees on the mountainside
> He planted the seeds just before he died
> I guess he knew that he'd never see
> The red fruit hanging from the tree
> But he planted the seeds for his children and me--
> Gone, gonna rise again.

So where Reagon sees selflessness, I see self-interest "well understood." And I very much appreciate the point about "analysis that says that what you believe in is worthwhile for human beings in general. . . ." In turning their backs on old white people, a lot of people very comfortable about their love for humanity seem to think either that half the country is too stupid to act in their own self-interest, or that the benefits of the democratic program don't really extend so far.

So self-interest is not a fixed single, fixed conclusion, and there is nothing automatic about about "interest well understood". People in similar situations may calculate their interest in different ways, and we can change our calculations as information and frames of reference change. For sure, some paths are better than others, lead us more directly to our goals. But uncertainty clouds all our plans. None of us can be sure we have made the right choice until after the fact.

Despite the uncertainties, self-interest is a real and central element of our behavior. We can define it very broadly, but it is not infinitely elastic. We can track down what people believe about our and their self-interest. And if we want to predict how we or others will act, our best

guide is to look past our public explanations and excuses to personal advantage. Follow the money and power and status. We may do good for others, but almost always we try to do good for ourselves first.

That said, we always understand what's best for us within a set of ideas and assumptions. If I fear my neighbors and believe that God or Walmart will always provide, I make very different choices from those who look to community. We can't ignore beliefs, because these are the lens through which we understand our self-interest, over the long run. A big part of the job of political workers is to understand the function of faith, **how ideology and interest intersect.** But we should never confuse professed ideals and principles for the real motivators.

In any case, the world rolls on regardless of our fantasies and rationalizations. We face real problems, whether we acknowledge them or try to ignore them. Our chances of solving our problems depend on coming to some agreement about what we really need as individuals and as communities. That in turn depends a lot on how closely our models fit the real world. The shared reality is ultimately what binds us together.

The good news is that we can help each other rethink what is in our best interest. So that's the other big job for politicals: to work to match our understandings more closely to reality, so that we can share a common understanding and common goals. I can think of a couple ways to start these conversations:

- We can articulate to ourselves and others what kind of life we want.
- We can think about what our goals under with different time horizons. What are the immediate and long-term costs and benefits of sticking with this job, eating these foods, driving this car, and treating ourselves and others this way?
- We can think about how our actions affect people close to us and farther away. What would our lives be like if everyone acted the way we do? What would happen to our community?
- What are our choices right now and later on? What would it take to be able to change course?
- Who do we fear, and why? Who do we look to for help? Are those expectations realistic?
- What do we need to get along-- not just material things, but emotionally as well? What is the basis of our self-respect and respect for others? What are we proud of-- and what do we need to keep true to our best selves?
- What are the systems, from power grids to science and law, that we need to invest in to take care of ourselves and our community?

As always, folks who want to change other people's minds have to be open to changing our own.

Understanding our own self-interest and others' is the only durable basis for collective action, for democracy. To be able to trust each other, we need to know what to expect, and then we need to identify or piece together common ground.

As noted earlier, some folks are so well insulated by wealth and power, their interests and ours can never be reconciled. What hurts us profits them. But this is only the top tier of gangsters.

One other thing. We are not stupid. We can be selfish and fearful but we are smart, too. Anything some of us can understand all of us can understand. We can figure out what's good for us all.

A note on calculating risk and reward. Jost and others posit that conservative people tend to be more risk-averse and fearful of uncertainty. Kahan, on the other hand, describes the "white male effect"-- "the tendency of white males to regard all manner of societal risk as smaller in magnitude and seriousness than do women and minorities." They attribute it to the need for men in authority or invested in authority to defend the hierarchy and the status quo with respect to environmental policy, for instance. Some men are also quick to promote guns and gun violence, seeing these as key elements of their status in this society. "White males who subscribe to ways of life that feature race and gender differentiation in social roles, our reasoning went, have a special stake in putatively dangerous activities essential to their cultural roles" (Kahan p.23). I haven't seen correlations between NRA activists and the men and women who feel most threatened by independent women, but I bet it's close.

I think in addition there's an even simpler, more widespread dynamic: the folks most privileged are also those most insulated from the consequences of their actions. If blue- and pink-collar rightists are unusually risk-averse, richer people are unusually risk-oblivious. It's the very essence of finance capital and extractive industry to shift the risks to others. President Trump is a good example of the free enterprise ethic --and they do mean free-- somehow misplacing billions of dollars in the course of his career, most of which belonged to other people. Perhaps it slipped behind the cushions on the sofa.

Then we have folks who see openness, generosity and community as their best protection against the hazards of life.

Privilege. We can't very well consider our choices, and how we judge our neighbors' choices, without talking about privilege-- unearned advantage. Some advantages arise independently of policy-- a genetic predisposition to certain health outcomes, for instance (though we also know that predispositions are often triggered by environmental factors, and can be managed well or poorly depending on the available health care system, both the results of policy).

The more contested set of unearned advantages is privilege built on theft. Slavery, underpaying employees, stripmining mountain communities, dumping toxic waste from far-off factories, price-fixing, money-laundering in Delaware and other tax havens &c &c, all these enrich a few people by harming many.

Then there is that very broad category of benefits a more or less democratic government allocates to its community, in whole or in part, including services, subsidies, tax breaks, and physical, legal and social infrastructure generated via tax, regulatory, and social policy. Roads and public utility companies, government-funded research about cancer and climate --the very existence of money-- these benefit almost all of us. Social Security, offered to tens of millions eligible by age and income, as proxies for need. Then we have subsidies skewed to the wealthy, ranging from cheap leases of public lands, to tax breaks for oil companies and homeowners with mortgages, and many, many more.

The line between the second and third categories is a bit blurry, because what I call benefits may be applied and paid for unfairly, and with scarcity, allocating more to one group means giving less to another. The costs may be spread unevenly, as with our tax system riddled with loopholes for the rich. But the benefits are real and could be shared more widely.

This third category does not in principle demand and *depend on* exclusiveness and exploitation. Social Security has survived many Wall Street onslaughts because it benefits a very broad section of the U.S. population. 2016 presidential candidate Bernie Sanders called for "Medicare for all", not just for old people. Legal protection and economic opportunity could be opened up for women, low income people and people of color, as well as for rich white men. So in principle some advantages now restricted to certain groups could be extended to everyone. A good indicator is criteria based on need. The second type can't be extended broadly; the beneficiaries pay for their advantages by robbing others-- or their granddaddies did.

Even though it's hard to distinguish between privilege and deserved benefit, it's important to make the effort, because the distinctions imply what we might do to make the system more fair. Continuing with the health care example: rather than dismantle Medicare because it privileges one set of people over another, we could make everyone eligible-- and fix our tax system to pay for the expansion.

Another example might be labor unions. Having fought and won decades of battles with their employers, union members (in real unions, not the fake ones employers and gangsters sometimes set up) are definitely privileged compared to non-union workers with respect to pay, benefits and working conditions. The obvious solution would be to strengthen toothless labor laws and unionize lots of folks so that everyone can enjoy these protections.

Instead, rightist politicians demand we wipe them out entirely-- the "Right to Work" laws engulfing our states like a toxic red tide. Rather than help more people climb the ladder, they want to smash unions and kick the ladder over. Within unionized workplaces themselves, it's common for employers to demand the right to cut wages and benefits for newer, younger workers in return for preserving these for more senior workers. Not only does this make rich people richer, it helps split and weaken the labor movement.

The right is already adept at dividing us --see, for example, the claims that old people steal from young people to luxuriate in Social Security, or that old sick people force healthy young ones to take health insurance the young people don't need. As I write, my local school system is pitting teachers against school support staff to justify reneging on wage promises.

We don't have to buy into that zero sum game. Fact is, the best things are even better when more people have access. Rather than fighting over scraps with people who should be our allies, we can make common cause to establish the rights and command the resources that help us all-- the most needy first.

In part, privilege means having lots of resources available, and insulation from misfortune and mistakes. It means many things beyond that: being able to attend school safely or walk safely at night; not having to fear the police; being listened to at home, in school, on the job, in church; getting considered for jobs; seeing people like me portrayed often and favorably by the mass media; having companies vie for my custom, and on and on. In the USA, rich white men in particular enjoy these benefits. This kind of "privilege" should be simply the common right, expectation and experience of us all. Those of us with pink penii should feel no guilt about having these rights, but rather about not sharing them with all.

Privilege also means we get to blame others because they don't make the choices we make. I remember standing with some fast food workers demonstrating for better wages. Passersby

would shout from their cars, You want better pay, go to college!-- the perfect expression of the servile professional class that administers this country for the billionaires.

Even privilege that doesn't involve daily, in-your-face active exploitation (as with gender violence, for example) can create big problems, because the self-justification that goes along with it makes it hugely easy for us to blame others for not being so happily situated. If we so richly deserve the good things we have, it must be their own fault that others lack these. Those People are stupid, lazy or malicious, and we need no other explanation for, say, racial disparities in graduation rates, generally lower wages for women, or poor health outcomes for low income people. We can't imagine what it would take for some women to leave abusive partners-- and don't bother to try. Some of us see police shoot unarmed black men on TV and cheer --these pink preppies who have a dozen ramparts of money and association between them and legal penalty-- not to mention that most effective form of body armor, the right complexion. Some of us rail against immigrants, assuming that coming to the U.S. is no more than a lifestyle choice, as locally-born people might switch jobs, or buy a house to take advantage of a better school district. Clutching tight to our own privileges lest open arms spill them to the ground, we attack defenceless immigrants while studiously averting our eyes from the political and economic violence that tears immigrants from their communities. So unearned privilege of every kind corrodes honesty and common sense as well as community ties. It makes us stupid.

Yet another telling example: the folks who do charity work and then pass themselves off as experts on the life of low income people. I think in particular of yups like me who might spend a couple months or a couple of years in a lousy neighborhood working a homeless shelter or driving sick people to doctor's appointments. We can feel mighty fine about our contributions. We can also lose sight of the fact that any sacrifices we might have made along the way were entirely voluntary; that folks with good education and rich relatives can return to suburbia at any time. For all our sympathy and good works, we may miss the core elements of what poverty is really all about.

I think also of an event I went to a while back. A group of students and teachers were trying to convince their state assemblyperson to support tuition equality for immigrant students (in my state immigrants have to pay up to three times as much to go to state colleges as their locally-born classmates). The representative replied that college is not the requirement of a worthy life, that he himself had had to quit college when his dad died, that everyone can succeed if they work hard and make sacrifices. Thus no big deal if you can't afford college. The assemblyperson did not promise the students they would inherit their dad's auto dealership, as he did.

I guess my favorite example of privilege are the Trumpists who damn the Affordable Care Act. We're healthy! they boast. Why should we pay for insurance while we're healthy? Unfair! Let sick people pay and rot if they can't! (Tolbert.) Much as I would like to rely on the natural processes that mop up failed mutations, in fact, in order to help all the people who need help, we also have to save these vicious and ignorant people from themselves.

So as we attend to white privilege, we should not lose sight of the broader application of the analysis of privilege: it smashes to smithereens all the preposterous justifications of the core libertarian claim that inequality is entirely the result of different talents, skills and effort, with little to no effect from unjust social structure. Libertarians are liars, pure and simple, and poor

ones at that-- were they not so so cocooned in trust funds and country clubs, they would realize that the rest of us see right through their whiny excuses.

Nominal privilege. Here I think it's important also to touch on the role of what I call nominal privilege: the very thorny benefits entangling some of us, to persuade us we have a stake in the unjust status quo. Women perched high on a shaky pedestal of obedience and unpaid labor; U.S.-born white workers demanding preference in competition with very low wage labor by immigrants and workers under dictatorships overseas; the extra-special depitty vice assistant managers paid poverty wages for 70-hour workweeks; the gallant warriors privileged to kill and die to protect their helpless female property. Nominal privilege is the chief confounder of our understanding of self-interest.

Sometimes it seems that those graced with such dubious advantage --anti-union workers, anti-feminist women, rank-and-file racists of all stripes-- are even more ferocious in defending injustice than the bosses who benefit most directly. I attribute this to the intense resentment some of us may feel when, having ourselves calculated we'd best settle for crumbs from the big man's table, we see others dare to challenge the powers that be, and sometimes get away with it. That puts into question the bad deals, the raw injustice some of us have accepted, thinking we had no better choice. It's a big threat to our own self-justification.

(I can only guess how hard it must be for people who have been abused so intensely to push these terrible experiences to one side in order to get on with their lives; in order to live at all, even, when speaking out risks murder. It makes sense that, having buried their suffering as best they could, they hate when others put the spotlight once more on these crimes. But in blaming the women and men who won't be silent, some who have been hurt displace from its true targets that fury they have tried so long to suppress.)

Then there's the plain fact that, in times of conflict, authoritarians will pay a premium for people willing to betray their brothers and sisters, to snitch and preach and cover up crimes and show up in photos to prettify the otherwise rigidly narrow ranks of the rulership. This is nominal privilege, too, even for the flacks making millions, because their windfalls depend entirely on the magnitude of the threat of democracy. When their employers feel secure again against this great danger, the thugs and snitches will lose their jobs.

The nature of authority:

Why is it we pay more attention to some people than to others? For some of us, the main requirement of authority is that it be authoritarian, able to impose control. Others look to a different set of attributes.

- Challenging authority (almost any authority) undermines social order and leads to chaos./
- There's only one true Authority. The rest are malevolent frauds./
- Individuals and institutions become authoritative only by meeting challenges and developing solutions to our most pressing problems. Authorities must have proved their competence in some way.

The first statement implies that maintaining order is the primary attribute and function of Authority, aka Might makes Right. This is a powerful formula, because stability and security is so important to us. Most people, even on the margins of our communities, have managed some accommodation with the status quo. Our lives might be lousy but we know what to expect and we've figured out some workarounds. So far we've been able to keep our heads above rising waters. The known order, however unjust, seems manageable. We don't know what war or revolution would bring.

So we are right to be concerned about trading a fragile subsistence for the uncertainties of a new order. It might drain the swamp, or generate waves that drown us. The Saddam Husseins of the world keep power in part by telling us, After me, the flood. Unfortunately, the very nature of their murderous regimes means that they are all too often right, precisely because they have smashed the infrastructures of learning and social security on which democracy depends.

(It's not accidental that professional-class people like me may be more willing sometimes to aspire to big changes; not only are we more insulated from the downside, we are in a better position to profit from a successful new regime. But what about all the Brits who voted to leave the European Union, a drastic constitutional and economic change? They seemed to be saying, we don't believe your dire warnings, we're willing to make some sacrifices, we'll muddle along as always.)

The first couple statements both look to higher power, but the second postulates one above all the rest, a benevolent father to whom we can appeal against less distant powers. Just as important, it implies that I am to be the judge of who is the true leader and who is false; and that means the real authority is me. But if I am to pick and choose which authorities I will obey, I better be able to cite some person or law whose reach supercedes all our local loyalties and submissions.

> Such a challenge almost invariably requires recourse to an alternative authority that is at least equal in status to the one issuing the demand. . . . If the appeal to higher authority is to have any standing, both parties —superior and subordinate— must accept its legitimacy. Even when they do, the demands of higher authority are often a matter of interpretation.
>
> -- Kelman p. 139

More to the point, perhaps: if we are to persuade our fellows to join our insurrection --against the Internal Revenue Service, let's say-- we have to convince them we will succeed because the highest power is on our side.

We have a long history of challengers claiming the authority of a higher power. A thousand years ago it was the faraway king, who would never countenance the abuses of his nobles if only he knew about them, or the Sleeping Emperor, who will return someday to restore justice. In 1941 the Catholic bishop of Muenster condemned the Nazi murder of mental patients and babies with disabilities, and " . . . called on Hitler to protect the people from the Gestapo" (Read p.729). Among some segments of our online community, obscure nineteenth century central European economists descend among us in visions to give direction to our lives (and the finger to democracy).

When we cite God as our higher Authority, insurgents rarely win the debate, because the gangsters can always employ more of God's spokesmen than rebels can afford:

> . . . while the operators hardly entertain a doubt about their own righteousness, the miners are again uncertain, ambivalent, and in constant need of justification. Their religion tells them that what they are doing is both righteous and sinful; and this contradiction is the lever which the operators use to finally break the precarious continuity between the old and the new, the actions and the beliefs, leaving the defeated miners culturally powerless, sinful in their own eyes (Portelli p.230).

Sometimes we invoke The People, but rarely very effectively, in part because, contrary to our slogans, The People are rarely united, and those who claim to speak for us are mostly liars. Two hundred years ago the lines were a bit clearer between workers and owners, colonized people and conquistadors, enslaved people and slavers, but even then there was nothing unanimous about resistance or obviously unacceptable about collaboration. It takes hard, dangerous work over a long time to develop broad support for democratic change. Claiming God is on my side might comfort me, as it does billionaires and other terrorists, but there are no shortcuts to cultivating collective action.

Someone making the third statement does not suppose any authorities to be perfect. Rather, she assumes they are all necessarily of limited competence, and judges them by their relative effectiveness. Libertarians warn darkly, Government cannot be your mom. Where they got that expectation in the first place I can't imagine. Most of us don't need a second mommy. We need effective ways to solve problems, and we conditionally accept authorities who can help us do that.

Understanding institutions and social processes:

Powerful forces affect our lives, including deliberate policy by banks, schools, churches, campaign donors, surveillance companies, armies, and the undirected if somewhat predictable currents of group behavior. We can feel helpless, or fearful, or somewhat hopeful about being able to push back-- sometimes all three at once:

- We are at the mercy of forces we can't understand.
- Institutional and social dynamics can be tracked and analyzed to counter threats and to build our own power.

These claims pivot on how much we understand. Are we no more than the floating wreckage from passing storms, or can we figure out how to navigate these complicated waters? Advertisers, politicians, investors and the lords of social media make their living by trying to predict and manipulate how the rest of us act, much as engineers study load stresses and hydrologists flows of water. The U.S. incarceration rate, the '07 housing bubble, the dynamics of holy war, the misinformation machines of Rupert Murdoch and Vladimir Putin-- all these have done vast and lasting damage, but they are not supernatural. They have causes and limiting conditions and, in theory, remedies. But ever more specialized education, and ever more remote institutions, makes it harder for most of us to figure out what's going on.

Perils of bureaucracy. The clientelist alternative:

In particular, we have good reason to distrust big organizations. Bad reasons, too.

- Bureaucracy is malevolent by nature, and it's out to get me. I'm going to stay as far away as possible./
- Large organizations can be malevolent but as often are simply unresponsive. Helping me is way down on their list of priorities, but there are ways to influence them./
- I need organization to fight parasitic organizations.
- I don't need organizations, just a good relationship with the boss. El patron will take care of me.

"Keep your government hands off my Medicare!" --protester (Packer)

We all have experience with predatory bureaucracies --Goldman Sachs comes to mind-- and with others that trample us only when we get in the way.

I guess it should not surprise me that we'd often rather think of ourselves as the victims of conspiracy than just another nameless victim of the blind machinery of state and enterprise. We are commonly convinced that, if some policy affects us, we have been personally targetted. After all, I am the central figure in my world; who could run me over without noticing? Makes perfect sense that They (the Illuminati? the Elders of Zion?) would direct vast powers and malice at me.

Now, it is true that I am the most important person in the universe. I get into trouble, though, when I assume that the universe knows this. It does not. And when the drug companies and polluters and holy warriors try to kill me, I don't think they're mad at me. They don't even know I exist. They're just out doing their thing, robbing and poisoning and chopping off heads, like you or I might eat ice cream or get high. They just wanna have fun. Nothing personal, you understand.

We don't have to prove that individual police are out to get people of color to know that some policing policies have discriminatory results. We needn't suppose that the fast food industry aims to wipe out millions of rainforest species to understand that their Asian palm oil plantations and cattle ranches in the Amazon do exactly that.

The trouble with They're out to get me is, all the bankster has to do is say, Sorry, I don't mean to trouble anyone, supply and demand you know, fiduciary duty, can't stop progress, blah blah, and he continues on his merry way because, although he knows with certainty his plans will kill hundreds or thousands of people, that's not his main purpose; he just wants to buy another trophy wife, artist, or country he doesn't understand.

Despite our suspicions, not all big organizations exist only to harm us. Some bureaucracies are community structures, such as the military or firefighters; we belong to them in some fashion, and share their goals, and follow orders because we want to belong to the community and may have a voice in decisions. Vance describes how the military can act in loco parentis for young soldiers, sometimes effectively.

As employee or client, though, we sit across the desk from a boss of some kind. We deal with him or her as a transaction. We give work and obedience in exchange for money or service. This kind of bureaucracy deals with us primarily as members of categories; it's the categories that define our relationships. They can never take the place of family or friends, so it's infuriating

when they interfere in our lives as if they know better than us, as if they cared about us personally. You're not my mom! Give me the damn money and let me take care of myself.

Even when not corrupt, modern bureaucracies are so far removed from the demands of our lives they don't and maybe can't fully take into account the effects on the rest of us of their procedures and decisions. Unless we can afford to hire a lobbying firm, it's really hard even to be seen by these giant organizations, public or private. We can (sometimes) choose not to buy their products. (At my small city airport there ain't but one way to get from here to there.) We can vote for politicians who will set up counter-bureaucracies to rein in the companies. We can cast our complaints into the twitterverse. For individuals, that's about it.

And even though some of us are allowed to vote once in a while, government agencies can be just as alien as the transnational corporations. Where the state is weak and billionaires are strong, the latter can easily capture or cripple institutions that are supposed to serve us all. Ignorant, arbitrary, grasping bureaucrats become gatekeepers collecting tolls from all who pass by, and kicking back the proceeds to their political bosses.

Maybe we don't have to bribe them. Maybe we are just met with poorly trained, can't-be-bothered timeservers. Cozy in our own little cubicles, professional-class folks don't always see the corruption, meanness, ignorance, or absurd petty-mindedness on the retail side of bureacracies. All very well to call for expanding government safety or health care programs, but rather than liberating us, for some folks this means being put at the mercy of yet another set of people who act like robots.

I don't think it has to be this way. I can imagine social services that are less intrusive and more responsive to individual needs. Much harder to accomplish in societies like ours, where they are the bastard orphans of hypercompetitive capitalism, begrudgingly tolerated when tolerated at all.

Not too long ago the *Economist* magazine did a piece about overregulation in the USA (3-2-17). One set of problems arises from the very fact of checks and balances, and legislative oversight: more chokepoints for lobbyists to occupy, and cumbersome machinery that makes it easier to add new rules than to get rid of the old. The writer notes that, while proposed policy changes are often well-researched, there is little incentive for follow-up to see if they work as intended.

Societies with robust social services and social safety nets are necessarily more democratic than those without, because they secure us a much wider range of life choices; we don't always have to sell ourselves cheap to the local gangster. Nevertheless, while they can be the product of democratic politics, the sprawling, one-size-fits-all bureaucracies are hardly democratic in themselves.

I worked a while for my county's Community Action agency, one of hundreds set up by legislation 30 or 40 years ago to serve low income people with classes, food assistance, referrals to shelters and a dozen other programs. They are largely the product of the civil rights movement. There were good folks on the board, but mostly ex officio members --I wonder how many meetings the county mayor attends-- and few low income people; mostly Board members did what they were told by the staff. Some of the rest of us saw our jobs there as a paycheck, not a service. Middle class people may work in these agencies but are seldom clients, and feel little investment in their success. My colleagues were honest, far as I could tell, and helped a lot of people, but I got no sense of a community taking care of its own.

To some extent, complaints about bureaucracy express our deep frustration with the clumsy, costly processes of dealing with lots of stakeholders in a mass society. For hundreds of millenia our ancestors spent most of their time in groups of ten or twenty, and partied with a bigger crowd maybe a couple times a year. The costs of getting along have risen a lot since then. It's good to have my town government contract with a waste management company to pick up my trash, for instance, but I don't like them telling me what I can put in the trash, or pile in my yard, for that matter.

In the U.S., bureaucratic clumsiness is in part a product of democratic clumsiness, the ugly process of making legislative sausage from the conflicting demands of thousands of stakeholders or their representatives, and the ongoing struggle to fund operations from a welter of sources, some more reliable than others, all requiring complex rituals of accountability that exclude rather than encourage grassroots participation. So some of this friction is inevitable. Be a lot simpler if the bureaucrats just told us what to do, like the self-appointed philosopher kings of Play-dough and Confucion-- at least we could hope for consistency. Me, I'd prefer a befuddled bureaucrat any day to arrogant suck-ups like the pompous technocrats who claim to know what's best for us, while really they know only what's best for their masters.

I notice that we tend to judge the failures of government more harshly than the private sector, which actually has a bigger impact on our daily lives. Maybe we expect more from government; that would be a good thing. We understand that when companies mess us over, that's not failure at all, but good business.

Not knowing how large organizations operate and how to move them compounds our fears. Some people say that this or that bureaucracy is like an oil tanker, hard to steer and slow to change direction. A more suitable simile might be a fishing fleet in rough seas-- try as they might to stick together, each vessel is subject to somewhat different pushes and pulls, and can often lose sight of the others. Like wars or any other large human enterprise, bureaucracies are bundles of interests that overlap sometimes and diverge at others; that sometimes achieve their goals and always produce collateral damage and unintended consequences. It's hard for the bosses themselves to direct them, even harder for us on the outside; but we can slow them down or push them faster, and deflect them to this side or that. We got to figure out how organizations work, who the factions are, what are the available incentives and penalties.

And we build our own organizations. How can farmers, workers, consumers and soldiers stand up ourselves against globe-spanning gangs, legal and illegal, without our own strong groups, including democratic governments? But building democratic organizations takes money, time, skills, and understanding how our personal goals are tied to the shared interests of the community. It's harder than getting a tattoo and joining one of the existing gangs for protection-- a corporation, a militia, a politician's entourage.

Believe it or not, the kind of impersonal state bureaucracy we have in some places today was once seen as a tremendous advance of the rule of law over the arbitrary whims of lords and kings. Even though the rules favor the elite, as under every other system, for the first time the rules were written out, decipherable, relatively stable, and once understood could be navigated even by the

lowly. Now big bureaucracies simply infuriate us. Comparing Iranian and U.S. fundamentalists, Riesebrodt notes :

> Depersonalized (and therefore morally vacuous) bureaucratic structures appeared to both Protestant and Shi'ite fundamentalists as tyrannical institutions exercising illegitimate power over the individual. Modern large-scale industrial enterprises and unions —'big business' and 'big labor'— as well as the modern state bureaucracy were regarded as reprehensible from a religious-moral point of view. Fundamentalism's economic ideal is the small enterprise organized along personalistic-patriarchal lines as the cornerstone of an economy regulated by religious moralism. . . . Fundamentalism recognizes the obligation of the rich to provide for the poor. However, it rejects bureaucratically organized welfare, which construes support as a right and is not combined with any kind of social control" (p.180).

No mystery why elites favor patriarchy, and hate the idea of legal protections and social services that allow their subordinates more independence. As for the rest of us, we may feel we have more leverage through personal relations with the Big Man, than standing in line before a corrupt bureaucrat with his hand out, or an honest one who's a stickler for the rules, and doesn't know anything about us. Many of us dream daily of our very own Prince Charming, Daddy Warbucks, or the billionaire benefactors of Horatio Alger.

The Godfather movies have a couple nice scenes depicting the formally respectful relationship between petitioners and gangster god, a good example of what's sometimes called clientelism. There are other elements, though, quite central: race, class and gender, by which which we replicate relations of subordination all the way down the web of dependency. Some men fear anything that allows women to be less dependent, and any version of social safety net that competes with women's role as personal mom/fuckee/diaper-changer (see Folbre's *Invisible Heart*.) Some white welfare recipients resent help given to people of color, when we deserve it so much more. One outrage much denounced in the 1990s was the U.S. government giveaway of $10,000 to every immigrant on arrival-- totally false, in case you were wondering.

Add the fear of people not like us to the long tradition of American isolationism, throw in our deep distrust of big institutions, and these go a long way to explain the world-wide revolt against global trade, defense and immigration agreements. But I don't think that's the whole story.

In traditional hierarchical society, there is between rulers and ruled a web of obligation, mostly flowing upward from below, but also containing a small but indispensable obligation of the powerful to protect their subordinates, to limit their theft to the surplus of our labor, to not take that last little morsel of food and security that we need to survive (see Scott's *Moral Economy*). And the rulers allowed us this subsistence in return for our obedience because constant coercion is expensive, and because they used to need our labor.

No longer. The Clintonites of the world, the hobnobbers with tycoons and dictators, have made it very clear they don't need us at all, and have no reason to look out for us. Harvard prof Sam "Hug a Dictator" Huntington calls these the cosmopolitan elite, distinguished from the rest of us by their suspicious predilection for opera and escargot over NASCAR and fried chicken. (Others have pointed out that "cosmopolitan" was an accusation Stalinists commonly leveled at Russian

Jews, as they threw them into the torture cells; it meant Uncle Joe didn't trust them to blindly obey their commie God.) Liberated by automation, unchecked borderless flows of money and talent, and the evisceration of Western democracies, this class of transnational corporados has betrayed the oldest social contract: the understanding that after taking care of all their important business, the powerful should spare a moment to look out for the rest of us.

They abandoned rural and blue-collar folks long before Mittson Rmoney's scathing dismissal of the 47% he thinks are useless dependent losers; long before not-President Clinton's labelling half of Republicans as unredeemable "deplorables". LBJ was about the last U.S. president to dare utter the words "poverty" in public, as in, "This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America" (NPR 1-81-14).

The transnational elites have also jettisoned Lind's "local notables," the pillars of small-town business, social networks and politics. Presidents since Clinton have realized they don't need these folks any longer to reach voters, and they get in the way of selling off our industrial base and replacing local retail with Walmart and Amazon. Stodgy local and regional elites have become a burden to the sleek, mobile investor class, who have done to them what Halliburton viceroy Paul Bremer did to the entire Iraqi Army-- dismiss them all without pay, but not without their guns. Now our countryside teems with bands of ronin without masters, rebels without a clue, jockeying fiercely to recruit their own followings from among the newly abandoned.

A hundred fifty years ago, when local elites realized they were being displaced in party politics by the robber barons and their money, the former started the Progressive movement, in uneasy, tactical alliance with farmers and labor unions. Today many white middle class activists seek to regain their hegemony through the Tea Party, holding Congress hostage to its demands to strip government of every public service except what serves the white middle class.

The situation overseas is if anything even more grim. Even in outright kleptocracies the thieves-in-chief used to have to spread the loot around to keep the underlings from getting too ambitious. Elaborate patron-client networks held the polities together. But in the new states of Africa the gangs can drastically reduce their overhead. Thanks to our splendid infrastructure of money laundering, surveillance and military contracting, they can steal on a scale heretofore possible only for invading conquerors. They share very little. The main thing they offer their loyalists is the license to steal as much as they can from people even further down the ladder. So while the squeeze from the top is fiercer than ever, it is replicated at every level right down to the retail bribery charged by the lowliest cop; who then has to kick back to his bosses most of what he steals. Chayes points out that terrorism is a very common response to this kind of massive corruption. We glimpse in Russia and Nigeria one possible future for the USA, not so distant.

**** How do we know? Authority, expertise and trust.**

Lots of times we can't agree on what's happening in the world and what it means because we have very different ideas about where our understanding of the world comes from. Thirty years ago, several women put together a study called *Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind* (Belenky et al, 1986), which prompted a very useful and wide-ranging discussion over the next several years. My understanding of this aspect of the ideological underlay owes a lot to their ideas. Here are some ways we learn about the world:

● We rely on Authority, divine or expert to help us make sense of this mysterious world; we can't know much by ourselves./
● We can't ever fully know the truth, if there is indeed an objective truth out there. Everyone has her own opinion; and mine is just as valid as anyone else's./
● I'm smart, I know what's going on. I don't need anyone to tell me what's what./
● I learn from my own experience, and by listening to others. (Belenky writes about "connected knowing"./
● I learn from my experience, by listening to others, and by learning the procedures both to test my ideas and to compensate for the limitations of how we process information[2] (Belenky's "procedural knowing".)

At its core, these attitudes reflect how much we trust our own experience. We might think:
● I don't know anything, even about my own life. The authorities know better than I my goals, needs, capabilities, worthiness and sexuality./
● My experience is typical. The world is what I see of it, and I can judge others by what happens to me.
● My experience is a very small sample from a big world. I am the expert about my own experience but I have to learn from others about theirs.

Authoritarians of every stripe tell us we cannot know the world we live in, except as they reveal it to us. Thank goodness for sex. The second reason is that sex and gender are a major site of contention between the ayatollahs and personal experience, and when they lie to us, we have to

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[2]limitations: Even though our senses are severely limited (the range of light and sound we can perceive, for instance), we have to make sense of too much data (all the sounds, sights, chemicals, pressures and pains that bombard us every moment) while at the same time trying to make do with very incomplete information (our state of health, what the boss really wants, next year's rates of return, where next the NRA will slaughter a bunch of schoolkids, etc.). Add in the trillion-dollar opinion manipulation industry, and the digital torrent from our machines-- no wonder we find it hard to pick out signal from noise, and then interpret it correctly. On the whole we succeed pretty well, but the mechanisms we use, such as stereotyping and rules of thumb, have built-in limitations. Also, we are notoriously susceptible to "confirmation bias": seeking data that fits our preconceptions while screening out contradictory information. The more we rely on online browsers for information (as I did for this essay) rather than neighbors and colleagues, the narrower our viewpoint. Our ancestors had to make sense of grunts and rustlings in the tall grass. Now we are slammed by data whose volume and frequency bear no relation to the truth about our world.

Many of us are aware of these effects, but do not systematically take them into account when we make decisions. From time to time I come across self-described rationalists who see themselves as challenging conventional wisdom and the emotional appeals of the mob, taking only Reason (whatever that is) as their guide. From my small sample, these folks are as fond of confirmation bias as the rest of us, they just use longer words.

Be that as it may, it's a notable accomplishment of the political media of our time that many of us consider ourselves to be independent thinkers while reciting the latest conspiracy theory we came across online. The illusion that we are getting independent confirmation (or, better, for the religiously inclined: Hidden Truths Revealed!) makes us doubly convinced we have discovered the truth. I suppose the folks in the sixteenth century who blamed witches or Jews for their scrofula were just as sure of their sources.

work *very* hard to pretend they tell the truth. If we don't succeed in lying to ourselves on such fundamental issues, we can also challenge our bosses on other things.

There is a contrary impulse to reject what we're told by bosses and experts. After all, their interests so seldom overlap our own. The Protestant movement to replace priests with the authority of the Bible, in theory accessible to every literate person (in practice hedged about with centuries of confusing commentary and apology) expressed this project of reclaiming esoteric knowledge for the Everyman (not, of course for women). Democracy itself is built on the idea that we ourselves are the best judges of what's good for us, not priests or the self-inflated know-it-all philosopher kings of Plato and Kong Fu Zi. In the U.S., at least in theory, it is citizen juries which decide many civil and criminal matters, not judges (though the judges determine what jurors see and hear, and what questions they may ask). Self-taught experts share much useful knowledge in families and online. And we can see a cult of self-conscious amateurism in such figures as Hitler and President Trump, who delight in smashing the conventional wisdom and making fools of its purveyors-- often exquisitely easy to do. It was the Best and Brightest who brought us nuclear power, the Viet Nam war and successive financial crises.

In this dis/information-dense world, skepticism is the beginning of learning-- but only the beginning. Faith in our own good judgment is a useful sentiment, rendered poisonous when we don't know how to sort good information from bad, and fall back on our prejudices as if hearing the voice of God. Unconscious of our own mental processes, we end up slavishly adopting the same old false ideas, in the guise of independent thinking.

People less beholden to revelation, consciously or otherwise, needn't feel too smug about it, however. After all, we, too depend on the pronouncements of authority to help us make sense of the world. We can cite this or that research about racism, gun violence, or climate change, but we didn't do those studies ourselves; in some cases, we wouldn't know how. With years of study, scientific knowledge is accessible to all, but that's true as well of Christian scripture and various esoteric religious practices, going back to the Eleusinian mysteries and earlier. Think of the millions of pages written about the Book of Revelations and other religious texts. More home-grown bodies of arcana, too, like the KKK Bigotry for Dummies manual: "I need to know the whole book of knowledge. Like if someone asks, 'Why do we hate Jews?' I didn't know before, but I found out. It was Jews that put Christ on the cross" (Horwitz p. 98) One of my students displayed similar diligence memorizing The Knowledge, hoping to be admitted into his neighborhood gang. Mastering a body of information, however true or fabricated, delights religious people and the faithless alike.

The key differences I see: We learn about the world by observing it. We build on the work of other observers, when we can verify it. We feel more confident in our conclusions when they are supported by several independent sources of evidence. (The theory of evolution, for instance, is supported by research in anatomy, geology, medicine and genetics, among other lines of inquiry.) We double-check when our conclusions are very convenient to our pocketbooks or prejudices. We are more interested in solving problems than in enforcing the rules. We don't hold on to secrets in order to hold on to power. We understand that researchers contradict each other and themselves, that no one has a monopoly on the truth, and that reality is in any case bigger and more profound than we can ever fully understand or represent; at best we can get closer to seeing the world for

what it is. So for the non-religious, while there is an objective truth, independent of our druthers, authority is contingent and limited.

At the same time, our personal experience is limited, too. Most people fall into a familiar *range* of behaviors, but our individual circumstances are much more varied, so we end up making very different choices. If we consider our own situation to be the norm, we can feel mightily shocked by the rest of the seven billion. To understand our co-inhabitants of this planet, we start with our own experience and then reach beyond that; we have to talk to each other.

Once again, Metzgar writes insightfully about how we see the world:

> . . . in my experience working-class adults have a strong tendency to give too much weight to their own direct observation and experience. There is a clear strength to this, as they are often very complex interpreters of what they have seen and lived. But it can often cause them to discount the value of "book-learning" and "abstractions," and it can be difficult for them to articulate their interpretations of their direct observation and experience in a mixed-class, mixed-race, mixed-everything public setting. On the plus side, though, "by my lights" is one of several expressions whereby people acknowledge that not only is their own observation and experience necessarily limited – that is, they know they're only seeing or feeling one small part of a massive elephant – but that they also are bringing their own unique framework, their way of seeing and thinking, to their report/interpretation of that experience. And, in most cases, the expression invites others to share how they see things by their lights while firmly asserting the value of one's own lights. . . .
>
> The educated middle-class, on the other hand, while officially recognizing a thorough-going epistemological relativism ("observation interferes" even in physics), has a strong tendency to overestimate the number and certainty of "known facts," to confuse "evidence" with "proof," and to try to "escape" from belief through the use of rigorous methodologies that can overcome or get beyond "subjective biases." . . . we too tend to overestimate how large what is known is and the degree of certainty with which it is known.
>
> If I had my way, there would be more experimentation with putting these two contrary, but potentially complementary epistemologies together (2012).

Folks who resist the idea that we have much to learn from each other may belong to very homogeneous communities, where almost everyone belongs to the same class, religion and ethnic group. We feel sure about our judgments because our peers so seldom challenge them. For middle class people, going away to college used to be something of an antidote to our narrow experience, but now, with wildly inflated college costs, many of us have to go to school locally or online, barely interacting with fellow students. Thanks to the miracles of technology, some of us may acquire the credentials without ever looking up from the screen. Indeed, I saw a fact-free

documentary once in which a black guy said black people don't need to go to college at all because they can find all they need on the internet. And in this he did no more than echo the promises of the corporados who for decades have been touting the internet as an unprecedented liberating force. Every day, though, we see compelling evidence that this mass medium often merely makes more comfortable the intellectual cages we lock ourselves into. It's easier and more satisfying to tune into U.S. and Russian disinformation machines than to talk to the neighbor across the street.

Meanwhile Zuckerbook and the rest of the advertising apparatus have divided us into minute consumer populations, further segregating the information flows we get. I have no idea what young people see in their daily hours online. So mistaking our own experience for the whole world is liable to become increasingly troublesome. (Anyone who thinks this is a problem exclusive to rightists must have slept through the last several elections.)

Mass media does not however force us to exclude contradictory ideas, so sometimes we turn to legislators. We all want others to agree with us, to affirm our correctness and sandblast any troublesome contradictions, so that we can proclaim without qualm "Everybody knows that." "It's just common sense." We shop around for Authorities who will tell us what we want to hear. This becomes more urgent when the world itself is telling us our ideas are wrong; when our efforts and expectations meet failure after failure. The stakes are even higher if we are heavily committed to a particular understanding of the world, if it becomes central to our personal sense of identity. So folks with failed ideology are the ones most intent on forcing their ideas on the rest of us. Free market fanboys, for instance, are less thrilled about the marketplace of ideas. They want government to adopt and proclaim one or another belief system to the exclusion of others. They need the rest of us to believe in order to shore up their own faith. As one of Mussolini's thugs wrote, "Propaganda is the instinctive need of the convinced. . . . It appears absurd that others do not think like me." (Brendon 142) Not just absurd-- threatening.

It's not surprising that folks whose understanding of the world is constantly undermined by actual experience should feel a special need to reclaim a sense of certainty and control. Frenkel-Brunswick claims to discern something called "intolerance of ambiguity", and attributes it in part to personality type (which doesn't seem to me much of an explanation).

> Frenkel-Brunswik (1948) argued that intolerance of ambiguity constituted a general personality variable that related positively to prejudice as well as to more general social and cognitive variables. . . . There is sensitivity against qualified as contrasted with unqualified statements and against perceptual ambiguity; a disinclination to think in terms of probability; a comparative inability to abandon mental sets in intellectual tasks . . . after they have lost their appropriateness. Relations to home discipline and to the ensuing attitude towards authority will likewise be demonstrated quantitatively. (Jost 2003)

Such a strong need for certainty may also derive in part from the inherently destabilizing effects of global capitalism. Certainly "disaster capitalism" is a booming business, literally, as Naomi Klein explains in *The Shock Doctrine*, and traumatized and displaced people seek leaders who promise to restore control. That preference for "unqualified statements"-- sound like anyone we know? In trying to figure out how the resolutely amoral President Trump could become the

favorite of millions of evangelical Christians (as was Reagan, another only cosmetically religious politician), Anderson suggests it's Trump's

> prophetic style-- that speaks to evangelical voters at a primal level. The prophetic style points to decline—but also to a path toward salvation. It is defined by a conviction that the faithful possess higher truths, sealed off from and immune to critique from evidence-based sources of authority. . . . Trump's speeches and social media output are a stream of falsehoods that speak to the certainty—the "higher truth"—that white Christians, and the nation they love, are being betrayed and targeted. . . . Conservatism . . . offers the promise of fixed principles and absolute truth. The vacuum of meaning is filled by religious and political prophets who know precisely what it all means, where the problem lies, who betrayed us and how to get to Heaven. The basis of their authority isn't expertise or mastery of a body of knowledge; it's their claim to the truth—to higher truths. Truth doesn't emerge from evidence but from the strength of will to reject the evidence put forth by corrupt secular—ungodly—institutions like the mainstream media and its ally, the liberal political establishment. . . . Such acts of resistance are core to the identity of many right-wing evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. (Theo Anderson, 2016)

For some of us, claims made with a show of certainty, no matter how untrue the substance, are far more compelling than more nuanced, conditional and accurate statements. It's the same attraction that draws millions of viewers to TV wrestling, which is much less about physical skill than about display, boasting and triumph. How is it that for tens of millions of Christians a lying greedy bullying treasonous sex offender has replaced Jesus as latterday savior? The boasting, the puffery, the shaking of fists, we know it's all fake but we love it anyway. We wish we dared shake our fists, too.

I taught an adult GED class once. I noticed that folks with the least control over their lives, the most chaos around them, tended to speak with the greatest certainty-- "You *will* do this. I'll *never* do that." Another favorite categorical assertion/ rejection: "Not happening." These folks gape at their own lives with horror and disbelief.

In contrast, scientific statements --always limited, in principle always open to challenge, and always raising further questions-- can be very stressful to people just looking for a guarantee that we're on the right track.

As we drop through the rabbit-hole into the alt-facts dimension, all these issues become intensely more important to democracy. In the late 1990s Andres Oppenheimer wrote about the impenetrable veils-beyond-veils of Mexican politics, corrupted by dictatorship and drug gangs.

> The veteran journalist looked at me with the eyes of a cow, puzzled by my outburst of journalistic excitement. A PRI senator had told a blatant lie . . . . So what else was new? He shrugged. The big news would have been if he had told the truth. The fact that I had him on tape didn't make much of a difference. In Mexico, words were the cheapest commodity. You could change them around at a moment's notice, and nobody would be

terribly surprised by it. "If you publish that you have him on tape contradicting what he wrote in his book, he would probably say that you had misinterpreted his words, or that the voice on your tape is somebody else's, and the whole issue would fade away under a cloud of questions," the editor continued. "Chances are he may not even bother to answer-- he may not care."

It was far from an isolated incident. Mexican newspapers jolted you almost daily with a seemingly endless stream of bizarre revelations that -- unless you learned to take them with a heavy dose of skepticism-- kept you in a permanent state of agitation. Trouble was, you could not ignore them: Some of them occasionally turned out to be accurate. . . .

Studying Mexico, as one U.S. academic had once told me, was like working in Plato's cave: You only saw shadows and never knew which shadow belonged to whom.

Senator Aleman's flip-flop had long been typical of government officials' public behavior and fit right in to Mexico's tradition of no accountability. With a single party in power for more than six decades, a rubber-stamp Congress, and an obedient Supreme Court, government officials had long had only one constituency to please: "El Senior Presidente." . . .

The succession of contradictory government announcements and Mexicans' historic skepticism about their leaders had helped cement a feeling of political numbness in the population. Mexicans had become so used to being lied to that they were taking each new government announcement as corroboration that the previous one had been a fabrication, and as a warning that the latest one should not be taken too seriously. *The country was coming dangerously close to losing its capacity for surprise, shock, and outrage over the political scandals that were rocking it simply because there was widespread belief that the truth would never be known.* (italics added)

The word evidence had lost much of its meaning in Mexico. Even boxes full of original documents proving massive government fraud in a mid-1995 state election in Tabasco were easily dismissed by government officials as fake, turning what in most other countries would be a national scandal into total confusion. . . .

As usual, the issue was quickly buried under an avalanche of mutual accusations that turned it into an incomprehensible mess and ended up boring even the most interested observers.

A few years ago James Verini wrote about Nigeria's murderous kleptocracies and Boko Haram terrorism,

When I asked a local community leader in Atakar why no state officials had come to the attacked villages there, he said, "Why would they come?

> They are the sponsors of these things." And was Boko Haram involved? "Why not?" he said. "What is the difference?"
>
> It was a sentiment I heard again and again. Almost no Nigerian I spoke with believes Boko Haram is just Boko Haram. Some claim it's the creation of Wahhabis from the Gulf states; others, of "the West". Still others believe Boko Haram is backed by northern politicians vying for power; or by southern politicians who want to destabilize the north; or by people in President Jonathan's party who want to unseat him; or by Jonathan himself, in an effort to cancel elections in the north; or, if not by him, by the people around him. In fact, Jonathan apparently believes the last. In a moment of unbuttoned paranoia at a church service last year he said, "Some [Boko Haram] are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/ legislative arm of government, while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police, and other security agencies."
>
> And some Nigerians say that Boko Haram doesn't exist at all (Verini pp. 106-7).

I hear that Putin's Russia is a similar labyrinth of conspiracy and misinformation, which he has happily exported to the U.S.A., adding new twists to the maze already in place. In Russia, China, Brazil and many other places, the gangs in power use the courts to discredit their rivals before they jail them. As with drug laws in the U.S.A., corruption laws in those countries are applied very selectively to punish political enemies, while giving a pass to the criminals who obey the boss and pay him tribute. The public there correctly regards the courts themselves as corrupt and servile, and have little trust in the outcomes of investigations and trials. Unable to distinguish between the honest and the corrupt, it's easy to assume that every public official is a criminal. Then the political choice becomes, join this or that gang, and knowingly assist in its crimes, or withdraw entirely from political participation.

The Me Too movement --work that really goes back generations-- has moved us a long way towards justice for people who have been sexually assaulted; but we see how far we have yet to go. In 2018, after much shrieking and howling, the United States Senate elevated to the Supreme Court Justice a man accused of attempted rape. The president, the candidate and their supporters called the accusations a con job and a smear campaign, because that's exactly what they would do, and surely will. If these folks should ever feel the need to topple or cripple an opponent who has not actually taken bribes or raped anyone, it would be fairly easy to generate accusations. It was mere weeks after the Kavanaugh nomination battle that women reported being offered money to falsely accuse Robert Mueller of sex crimes, in order to delegitimize the Russia-Trump investigation. They've already got fake scandal in their playbook --remember Bush Junior's campaign to convince South Carolina voters that John McCain fathered a black child?-- and with Breitbart, Fox News, 4Chan et cetera they have developed over the years a dense, far-reaching multimedia conspiracy machine.

I also keep in mind the great Satanic Panic of the late 1980s, when rightist Christians exploited our commitment that reports of child abuse must always be taken seriously, to carry out their own

vicious conspiracy-spinning agenda, ruining many people's lives in the process (Victor 1993). So I don't think it's enough to chant We believe survivors, as many people who don't like rapists have been doing, any more than we can go back to the days when many liberals carefully ignored accusations against a Democratic president. More than ever we must insist on a process of investigation and judgment that we can trust.

Half a century ago I was thrilled at the scandals exposing the crimes of the nation's leaders, from the lies about Vietnam to Nixon's dirty tricks, FBI Cointelpro and CIA service to dictators. Once everyone sees the depth of the state's corruption, I figured, the revolution will surely follow.

I was wrong. The people who depend most on authority, who have the least confidence they can make sense of the world on their own, were left unmoored. The overwhelming cynicism and distrust ended up discouraging and dividing us, while leaving the levers of power in the hands of gangsters who have no doubts, who understand exactly what's going on and see their goals very clearly.

The stability of any government rests on the credibility of its institutions-- often aided by a willing suspension of disbelief. Here we like to think the courts get it more or less right, sorting the good guys from the bad. That way we don't have to contest every outcome (except our own). In my country law enforcement and the criminal courts have always protected the powerful, in fairly well studied and predictable ways, but not often have they been used so nakedly as now, as weapons in factional battles among the elite. Nixon tried to sic the IRS on his enemies but evidently they did not comply. If, after depicting his Department of Justice as a tool of the opposing party, President Trump then succeeds in his efforts to make it his own political instrument, we risk evaporating any residual trust in law enforcement. Meanwhile the rightists have made great strides in capturing judges' seats at every level across the country. Losing the independent judiciary is a staggering blow to the system of checks and balances which has stabilized the state through so many storms. We've always suffered under politicians who lie, cheat, steal and kill. But now we're in one of those moments when the institutions and competing power centers that once restrained the worst of the gangsters have been weakened to the edge of collapse.

I read that three centuries ago the talkers and writers who invented the Enlightenment, and the ideological basis for the American Revolution, thought that education would cure the ills of the world, and the shortcomings in our nature. They figured that the more we knew, the more we would understand the need to work together to solve our problems. They thought that, whatever our disputes and differences, we could always refer back to objective reality. They thought the truth would always, eventually, win out over lies.

This confidence in education was the bedrock of their faith in democracy. They knew less than we do about the depth and intensity of the authoritarian training to which we are subject, and disinformation campaigns that make us reject anything outside our personal experience, and often enough our own experience too. They knew about and feared churches but they did not know about Facebook or Cambridge Analytica or Karl Rove and Vladimir Putin.

Is this the kind of society we want to live in, all shadows and conspiracy? We're headed that way, and halfway there, and it goes way beyond our President. Holocaust deniers, Exxon-funded climate deniers, anti-vaxxers, creationist amusement parks, Fakes News, science for sale, internet frauds, infotainment, "reality" TV, robot bloggers, "science" shows about UFOs, politicians who

no longer even bother to lie plausibly . . . . How can we maintain Dewey's "deliberative democracy" when we can't even agree whether it's night or day? Trust is what holds our communities and grassroots organizations together, and it rests on telling the truth. If we can no longer say or even see the truth, everything falls apart.

I want us to be skeptical. But that includes having the basic skills and commitment to distinguish between what's probably true and what's most likely false, and institutions we understand well enough to judge their output.

Often we think that, if only we speak truth to power, everyone will acknowledge how right we are and flock to join our program. But this environment of disinformation makes that a very complicated project. Our bosses, our neighbors and our personal experience are likely to generate very different stories about what's going on in the world and what it means. It's not very effective to question another person's claims if she regards her sources as beyond challenge. Fortunately, most of us depend on a variety of sources, and sometimes we can learn to trust the more truthful ones.

**** Who belongs? Insiders and outsiders.**

So how do we affiliate? Our politics depends largely on how we draw the lines between Us and Them, between decent, normal folks like me and dangerous, malicious, crazy outsiders. There are lots of questions we have to consider.

How broadly do we define the groups we belong to? Are they pretty inclusive? Or are they exclusive in one or both ways: a) only a few can join; b) joining this group means I can't belong to others (authoritarians of all stripes insist their followers cannot belong to rival groups). Are the boundaries among groups very sharp and well-patrolled, or is there a lot of movement across the borders? Compare for instance how religious countries deal with gender and how we are learning to do it in democracies. How demanding are the groups we belong to? For instance, corporations, religions and the military all claim priority over every other obligation, whereas neighborhood groups and amateur soccer teams make only limited claims on our lives. Perhaps most important, what is the relationship between insiders (decent, normal folks like me) and outsiders? **With what mix of curiosity and opportunism, fear and hate do we deal with outsiders?** Our attitudes towards others are strongly shaped by our underlying sense of trust, and whether or not we see the world as a zero-sum, life-and-death competition.

Us: Here are some statements we might make about ourselves.

- I'm proud of who I am./
- I'm proud of what I do.

- I'm _____ , and always will be.
- I'm _____ , _____ , and sometimes _____ and _____ -- depending on how deeply we identify with our groups, and how sharply we draw the lines between Us and Them.

We are born into identities, and acquire more as we go through our lives. Some of these are supposed to be fixed-- male or female, white or black, &c. Social scientists call this ascribed status,

positions that we do not choose. Of course these are social constructs, inventions of our cultures, attached to value judgments arising from cooperation and conflict over many generations. They vary substantially from one culture to another. Sometimes an individual can change her assigned race, sex or religion, but it takes a lot of work and risk, and makes a lot of people mad.

Then there are the roles we take on or fall into, such as parent, doctor, skier, billionaire, gangster, invalid. These are not fixed or exclusive; one can be all of these at once or in succession. Most people carry multiple statuses, operative in different realms. Who are you at home, school, work, in church, among friends, with money, during elections?

Having that sense of pride based on ascribed status implies a hierarchy of good and less good people. If I'm proud to be a Martian, that must mean I believe there's something very special about Martians that pertains to no other group; I must be superior to those other people. One could in theory believe everyone is special in their own way --this one has big ears, that other a mole on the buttock-- but random uniqueness is a pretty flimsy base for for our tall banners of pride.

"I'm proud of what I do" is more inclusive. Maybe I'm proud to run a mile, or multiply three-digit numbers in my head, or take care of a bunch of kids-- but many people can do those things or learn to do them.

Dunno for sure, but it seems possible that people with few valued skills or other resources – with little to offer a group or leader other than loyalty— would be more likely to insist on the privileges of ascribed status. Why invest so much significance in accidents of birth? Perhaps because, for the lucky, they don't then have to actually accomplish anything; and for the unlucky, because the world does not value their real accomplishments such as raising healthy, responsible kids. Their membership in gender, religious or ethnic groups becomes their best claim on resources. I don't have to lift a finger to be white, male and at the front of the line; I just have to go along with it. Be proud of your pink penis! And when I have few other sources of respect or self-respect, the prospect of losing privileges based on ascribed status, however paper-thin these privileges might be in practice-- that seems like an existential threat. No wonder people are pissed off.

In Red China and Soviet Russia, the right class origin was required for advancement in the ruling party, and sometimes simply for not getting shot. Thank goodness the Russians and Chinese have reformed. Now you have to be a millionaire or billionaire to join the ruling class, just like in the USA.

Another motive for group loyalty is to deflect threats. I'm a manly man, and you can count on me to kiss the ass of even manlier men. So don't hit me. Beat up that other guy.

Then there are the more proactive sort of groupies. Call them the Border Patrol. You see them cruising every day along the boundaries, beating gender-bending classmates, targetting dissenters online, ratting out immigrants, threatening women who dare speak up, terrorizing Boards of Education, shooting boys who walk in the wrong neighborhoods. Altemeyer claims his surveys show that

> Almost everybody thinks she's more moral than most. But high RWAs [Right Wing Authoritarians] typically think they're way, way better. They are the Holy Ones. They are the Chosen. They are the Righteous. They somehow got a three-for-one

special on self-righteousness. And self-righteousness appears to release authoritarian aggression more than anything else.

With little else to sell, these folks find they can make a career of making sure no dirty outsider profanes our side of The Wall. "My son just joined [the Klan]," Velma added, "and he's a Grand Titan already!" (Horwitz p.98.)

Is it possible that do-gooders, too, can sometimes sound a wee bit self-righteous? Especially when we value preaching over listening, self-expression over building a mass movement.

As you'd expect, it's the politicians who are the real driving force behind these artificial distinctions. First, it's an effective way to herd us into their corrals and prevent defections. Just as in some prisons you have to join one gang or another to ward off constant rape and beating, the greater the ethnic and ideological divide, the harder it gets for us to take an independent stand, never mind consort with the enemy. We call it divide and rule. It creates a nearly effortless feedback loop, too: deep divisions intensify conflict, which divides us even further. Politicians like this because Enemies justify the politicians' growing power and endless demands. Our bosses especially like to use the various bigotries to taint and isolate opponents within their own group. Traitors! they rail at those less willing to attack outsiders.

Do-gooders too like to slice and dice, to emphasize the chasm between the tiny class of wealthy parasites and the rest of us. I think this differs from the way rightists do it in its fundamental inclusiveness. We claim to be the 99%, not this or that group fixed by race or belief; and all the billionaires have to do to join is stop ripping us off. (Some big-D Democrats figure we should just let tens of millions of "deplorables" die off; then they'll inherit the country. These smug aging yuppies have nothing to do with democracy.) For some of us, identity is much more fluid, and the gulf between oneself and others more bridgeable.

There may well be a class element not just to the groups to which we belong, but also how we belong. Recall Metzgar's distinction between middle class people whose identities are bound up with achieving and transforming, and blue collar folks with a stronger sense of belonging to community-- of community making them whole. I wonder if this plays out in the kind of community we assemble. I know professionals who delight in wide networks including artists, politicians, players in high tech or entertainment, some rich guy you can house-sit for, the person who cares for your pets, someone from another country, and of course a plumber or housekeeper (more than one would be pretentious). The extended family may be parked off on a side track somewhere, tangential; gramma has no idea, say or interest in who I hang out with. Certainly many professionals carry identities of skill and status that are much more portable than those of factory workers or small-city business people; we can pull up stakes and set down again almost anywhere. If granddaddy ever killed for a piece of land and cleared it and built on it, we don't know where or when. Rural and blue collar folks may have entirely different ideas as to what constitutes a sustaining network. It might not even occur to some people that community is something you select and arrange like fine china.

Them: We might say about outsiders,

- There are good people in the world and bad people. Only God can make bad people good./

● There are lots of kinds of people. Circumstances determine how we behave and what groups we belong to.

As to what we can expect,
● They're weird. They must be dangerous.
● They're weird, and can be made to seem dangerous. They are perfect prey.
● They're weird. What makes them like that? Can we make a deal?

We have elaborate rituals for finding common ground with strangers. We talk about the weather, the job, the football game, people we know. But we don't often initiate that search with folks already labelled Not Like Us.

The ability to recognize ourself in others takes self-knowledge and experience with people from different backgrounds-- not easy in authoritarian cultures, where bosses train us to see ourselves as their soldiers, and outsiders as our enemies. (By self-knowledge I mean some awareness of how we came by our own ideas, attitudes and practices, and their contingent nature.) Normally our own experience demonstrates how much we share with others. It's not so much that we need training to recognize that experience, as we need to shed the training we've had to disregard it.

Even where different groups have lived side by side for generations --pre-Milosevic Yugoslavia, for instance, or many parts of the U.S.A.-- if the condominium takes place under authoritarian leaders, they set up all sorts of economic and cultural barriers among groups, and any loosening of central control can quickly set us at each others' throats again.

So some of us make a living robbing and raping outsiders, defined as subhumans with no rights. Others have a broader expectation of finding common ground with strangers, and see advantage in doing so.

How we deal:
● I don't see race, gender, class. I treat everyone the same./
● I can't expect everyone to act the same, because we may have very different experience with respect to health, wealth, culture, gender and so on. I have to learn more about other people before I can know whether we can deal, and how.

I hear the first set of statements a lot, and I admire folks who treat each other with equal respect and compassion. But sometimes these claims are false. Sometimes they mean that I will treat young women of color the same as I treat middle class old white men so long as the women act like middle class old white men.

The very claim that I don't see these status differences rings false. Very young children don't see them; but we are taught very early on. (It's interesting also to see how quickly newly immigrated people learn the local hierarchies.) And once we believe that we ourselves are not affected much by the physical, cultural and socioeconomic context --that we are actually blind to it-- it's easy to conclude that regardless of their resources and life experience, everyone else should share our own preferences and reactions. This leads to invalid norming, unrealistic expectations

and unjustifiable blaming. No cop ever put me against a wall in my own neighborhood; if that happened to you, you must have done something wrong.

This pretense that we're all the same also generates false accusations of separatism against those who disagree, as when one of our Tennessee legislators, a white guy, complained that he was not allowed to join the caucus of black legislators. It should be obvious why it's necessary and democratic to meet as African Americans, or immigrants, or dentists. After all, no one demands to know why only the residents of a particular town get to vote for that town's council, and no one accuses them of bigotry or separatism, because those folks also send reps to state, regional and national decision-making bodies. Rightists like to use the example of women's groups or organizations of people of color to justify organizations whose goals and program are discrimination and exploitation.

There is a specifically religious version of denying difference. Since we are all children of God, with an equal chance to get to heaven, our temporary inequalities here on earth don't matter. God doesn't care if we're male or female, black or white, rich or poor. Such distinctions are trivial compared to eternal bliss in the hereafter. And if some suffer now it must be God's will, and perhaps their own fault.

Doug explains:

> "'I think everybody is equal before the Lord. I don't think there's anybody who has an inside track to the Lord at all. But when it comes to living here on this earth, there are hardly two people who are equal. And I think we do ourselves a disservice in government and society when we think that everybody has to be equal.'
>
> It is worth following this thread a little further, because it illuminates why popular understandings of the poor are more commonly associated with charitable efforts than with favoring social welfare programs. People have different talents and abilities. It follows that there will be different levels of compensation, a reason incidentally that many people believe the present economic system is basically fair. The notion of equality flies in the face of rewarding such differentials. It is as ludicrous, Doug Hill says, as 'the king having to walk when the servant rides on the horse.'
>
> This rhetorical flourish masks the possibility, of course, that equality can also mean something quite different; for example, equal opportunity, respect, dignity, or even access to decent housing and health care. The train of thought, however, moves away from equality to the reality of economic inequality. Social justice should be concerned with maintaining a system in which ability and hard work are rewarded, and thus it becomes relevant more for protecting the middle class than the poor (Wuthnow pp. 211-12).

Strange, isn't it, the inconsistent way we apply our standards of behavior? We are more likely to judge a teen by adult standards than a billionaire by the same common-sense judgments we might apply to our neighbors: Do you skip out on your obligations? Do you sell poisons to children? Do you dump trash all over the neighborhood? Do you speed in school zones? But for the powerful, we come up with a thousand excuses: I can't know his situation. He knows more than me. He has a secret plan. He got his mom into the most expensive nursing home. He gave a

thousand dollars to the children's hospital. I feel sorry for him-- it's so stressful to be a boss. He runs such a big enterprise, we can't possible hold him accountable for every little murder.

I notice we tend to give a pass to God, too. It's that old question, how can an all-powerful God cause such massive suffering? I'm told we can't judge God by human standards.

A different point of view tries to understand others in the context of their specific situations. It may be that we share similar needs, capacities, hopes and fears, but that our different situations lead to different choices. Four hundred years ago, with the great surge of Europeans invading other continents, some began to see that there are many alternatives to European religion, customs, technology and governance. Some writers went so far as to imagine Chinese, Persian and native American characters (not much resembling real people at all) as vehicles with which to critique the European social order. They came to the conclusion that we are largely creatures of culture and environment, that we vary not so much in our nature but by our circumstances, and that therefore changing our behavior hinges on changing our circumstances. This became a core understanding of the Enlightenment --and, by way of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, that crowd-- the American experiment.

So the second proposition recognizes that, for all that we share, we do indeed have important differences, and not just material differences. These elements of our identity, --gender, race, class, among others-- have sometimes been called standpoint, the position from which we see the world, which of course affects how we see it. Rightists claim we must ignore these categories as too divisive, even as they wield them like hatchets to chop us up. But many of us do not see these descriptors as fixed attributes, eternal categories independent from our mental constructs. We have seen how definitions and battle lines have shifted in just the past couple of generations, and we aim to mess with them further. We acknowledge privilege and standpoint in order to reach beyond the limitations of our own experience and situation; not to raise higher the barriers that already exist, but to understand how best to tear them down.

Not everyone got the memo. Many of us still think of our neighbors as good or bad, fixed in character and potential regardless of life experience. And while we hear maxims like, To understand a person, you must walk a mile in their shoes, understanding others, even incompletely, does take opportunity and modest levels of knowledge, skill, and willingness to take risks. I was sad to hear from my immigrant students that their locally-born classmates seldom asked questions about Mexico or India or Tanzania. I know it can't be that kids are not curious. Did their parents never ask questions? Did the parents say, Just treat everyone the same, and leave it at that? I know some immigrant kids don't like to stand out in any way from U.S.-born peers, so maybe they don't encourage such conversation. Probably it's hard for immigrant kids to describe in English experience that took place entirely in their first languages. One fifth grader herded goats before he came to this country. How would his classmates even know what questions to ask? And how would this ten-year-old know how to describe something that surely everyone knows already?

My point is, it takes some thought and skill to understand people not like us. People have been doing this for thousands of generations, so there's nothing extraordinary about it. But we have to make the effort.

A qualifier here. Sometimes we try so hard to see ourselves in others, we don't see the others at all. In the 1940s, a lot of people were surprised that Hitler was actually doing what he had promised. They thought that all the threats and violence were no more than a gifted but inexperienced young man's bluster, that no one could deep-down be so cruel; that really, Adolf would come to his senses as he matured. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said: "'The imagination of the criminal exceeds that of the innocent.' His meaning was clear: a criminal can imagine committing his own crimes, while his victims cannot imagine *anyone* committing such crimes" (Henriques 213). (And of course der Furor was terribly surprised and disappointed that the Brits wouldn't come to terms after he'd enslaved the continent; could not imagine a value system that resists collaborating with mass murder.)

In 2017, some people were surprised that President Trump was actually trying to do what he had promised.

At the other end of the spectrum, we can also indulge in a bit of romance about the Exotic Other. Some people admire sports stars and movie patriots. Some middle class white men see in less privileged people all that is good and true. My own romantic stereotype is . . . well, if I haven't let it slip by now, I will neither confirm nor deny.

Finally, I ask you not to worry. Set your mind at ease. Understanding the context for each other's choices does not plunge us into the damned netherworld of cultural relativism. We can be pretty consistent in our values. For instance, I don't like people who abuse women whether they're Christians, Muslims, Hindus or the head of the French socialist party. I don't like employers that steal from workers and pollute the environment, in whichever country they evade taxes. I don't like politicians that deny people health care, in the U.S.A. or in kleptocracies overseas. We can learn a lot from others but it doesn't require us to give up our own goals and priorities.

Exceptionalisms:

- I can tell you about other individuals based on the groups they belong to, but I myself am an independent thinker; I don't fit any of your categories./
- Like everyone else, I am influenced by my circumstances.

Some of us don't mind applying stereotypes to others, but fiercely resist any such boxing ourselves. As well we should. It's not right when others --whether TV talking heads, online surveillance and marketing juggernauts, political pollsters, by-the-book bureaucrats, or aging essayists-- try to jam our whole complicated lives and thoughts into narrow categories for their convenience and profit. Yet we ourselves do it all the time, and almost have to; our poor brains just don't have the processing power to deal with more than a couple dozen people in anything like their full uniqueness.

What's more, some generalizations are close enough to accurate to be genuinely useful. More men kill women than vice versa. The courts mete out harsher penalties to people of color. Fewer scientists go to church than the general population. These are not eternal truths, just bits of the reality in a particular place at a particular time. If we don't like these facts, we can work to change them-- but only if we acknowledge them. The people who refuse to check the race box on

applications on the grounds that race is irrelevant, they are denying that racism has anything to do with outcomes in health, education, employment et cetera, and deliberately sabotage our attempts to document these.

On the other hand, we often also subscribe to very false generalizations, especially when we can benefit by putting other people down. The question is whether we make a practice of checking our assumptions against the real world --what Belenky et al call "procedural knowing"-- and arrange our knowledge systems so that we do not reward bigotry and self-dealing. Hard to do that unless we admit that our points of view are limited, that we ourselves are influenced by our positions in society.

Where I live, to be an independent thinker means to declare oneself independent of verifiable fact, liberated from the limits of physical reality and social relationships, free to make any claim without burden of evidence, licensed to reject any challenge to our God-given prejudices.

Many of us subscribe as well to various exceptionalisms for the groups we belong to. For instance, many of us here think

● The USA has been divinely chosen to be the "city on the hill," the unique model of virtue and justice in the world./

● Despite its short history, protected location, wise Founders and fabulous resources, the people of this nation have experienced and perpetrated a staggering amount of injustice, violence and corruption. Our true accomplishments have more to do with the democratic experiment than with stock prices, iPhones or invading small countries, and the democratic project continues to be our task, against many present-day threats. Democracy is the bedrock of our prosperity and security, not rituals of holiday flag-waving.

The first statement is the global 007, our license to kill. We have been chosen; anything we do is by definition holy. "We" is understood to be a unified mass following without question the lead of a virtuous elite-- a big lie. The Puritan promoters of the "city on the hill" jailed or exiled religious dissidents, hanged women as witches and massacred Native people.

An opposing point of view recognizes that, like every nation, the USA has some special qualities but is comparable to other countries in many other ways.

An intermediate position might be, We're Number 1!-- a claim needing no justification, because self-evidently true. If the folks who feel this way were born anywhere else, they would say exactly the same about that other place. (These are also the folks who see no contradiction between sieg-heiling the Confederate flag and demanding that athletes be fired for kneeling during the national anthem, in protest against police killing unarmed black men.)

Among us also are people who think the USA is exceptionally bad, the great Satan. To some extent this conviction is directly proportional to the power this one country wields in the world; but its position as sole superpower is barely a generation old, and won't last for long.

One final observation about insiders and outsiders: authoritarians and democrats diverge on several measures, but there are few attitudes and practices we can't find in both camps. The most

consistent differences I see: the authoritarian obsession with control, and, closely tied to it, their unerring instinct to seek out the most vulnerable for persecution.

By definition and in practice, for authoritarians dominance and submission is the whole of the law, their heart and soul. Expecting an authoritarian person to go a week without beating up or sucking up would be like expecting ants not to swarm roadkill. The shrinks will have a field day with the memoirs of President Trump's lackeys, go-fers and hired guns, unless of course the President stays in power and the cash keeps flowing.

Now this urge to dominate or submit is built into the brains of a lot of social animals, possibly including human beans. Hardwired or not, like a lot of behaviors we can learn to control it. And we have good reason to shed this destructive mindset. For one thing, very few people who demand obedience from family, neighbors or employees are not themselves in thrall to all sorts of bosses above them. Many know no other way. But life on your knees is a crummy, humiliating sort of existence.

(Some people do their best to stay off the grid, and to depend less on the systems that dominate our lives. I'm guessing that the folks who succeed at this develop strong relationships of *inter*dependence with a least a few key people. I'd expect too that the more totally independent they try to be --maybe they supply their own food, shelter and health care-- the more controlling they might be in their few remaining relationships, because they have so little margin for error. But I don't know, having never been in that situation.)

To remake the world in their image, authoritarians make scapegoating the most vulnerable the core of their program. If they didn't have immigrants or women or gay people or people of color to pick on, they'd turn against some other group -- the people least protected, people they can attack with little risk. That way, no matter how incompetent and exploitative they have been, the bosses get to keep their positions, while their followers can go home suffused with that happy glow that comes from a good lynching. This is not to say authoritarians don't love their moms.

We hear a lot lately about "tribalism", almost always a reference to white racism, as nurtured and employed by rightist preachers and politicians, but sometimes generalized to include the growing distrust between Dcrats and the GOP, as opposed to the two-head corporate dog of the post-1945 establishment. I don't like the term. It's just a euphemism, like some people say "poop" for shit, and doesn't explain anything. To me these supposed "tribal" identities are thin fictions, little more than the surface of entrepreneurial hierarchies of power and privilege based on exploitation of outsiders, and organized largely to defeat political rivals. I say entrepreneurial because these structures and ideologies are the arenas of constant jockeying among elites and wannabes. Some of these identities seem to be very long-lasting indeed, but when we get to the particulars, they are constantly redefined by the enemies and victims of the moment-- Cherokee, Roman Catholics, black people, Reds, immigrants, Muslims, feminazis, professors . . . and I become a white Christian good ol boy as required by the enterprise. Clientelism is the dominant internal structure of these groups, combining specific dependencies on boyfriends, bosses and local politicians with a more general drive to attach to some big man who will save us. It's the internal structure that determines how they operate.

These aren't ethnicities, they are gangs, scarcely different from neighborhood bangers or transcontinental crime cartels. You got the bosses and the buttonmen and the enabling bankers. The rest of us are prey.

So how do we learn to establish relationships that are less coercive and more respectful and cooperative? People who incline more to the cooperative side should continue to engage with authoritarians but insist on respect, and resist falling into the control freaks' categories of submission and dominance.

**** Possibilities for change.**

Given what we know about the world and ourselves, what are the chances we can make it and us better?

The best of all possible worlds:

● There is an eternal God-given order, and it is necessarily hierarchical. Inequality is natural, necessary and inescapable./

● We live in the best of all possible worlds. History and the marketplace have tried every experiment, and have settled upon the only ones that work. Sure, there is always suffering in the world, but if things could be better they would be. So why waste a lot of energy complaining about things we can't change? We should count our blessings make the most of what we have now./

● There is nothing inevitable about any given social structure. We have become the dominant megafauna because we are so adaptable. We learn new things all the time. If we have made a lot of mistakes, we can also correct them. We can learn to build and live a more just society. We get to choose.

Statement number one: Well, of course. You'd expect our worldly existence to reflect the cosmic order, graded ranks of beings at the feet of the throne of the Almighty. As the governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony put it four hundred years ago, "God Almightie in his most holy and wise providence hath soe disposed the Condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subjeccion" (Isenberg *White Trash* p.30).

Others figure the "free market", as the site of competition and cooperation grounded in individual self-interest, is the only mechanism we need to supply an endless stream of happiness to all mankind. (I put the term in quotes because if there ever was a free market, it couldn't have lasted much longer than one of those subatomic particles, before becoming rigged in some fashion. The first thing unregulated markets do is morph into cartels and oligopolies, because competition is so ruinous.) Women, of course, are natural caregivers, more spiritually inclined than men, and as such need not suffer the rigors of the market, or the insult of a living wage.

Much of the second statement reflects perfect markets theory-- the idea that markets are a kind of implacably efficient global computer, perfectly calculating through the miracle of supply and demand among seven billion buyers and sellers, each with perfect information and freedom of choice, exactly the right allocation of resources to maximally satisfy our needs and desires. Utter nonsense, of course, but good business for a certain type of economist (see Yves Smith, among others). It is no easy task to persuade us unlettered folk that our daily experience is wrong, wrong, wrong.

That some people will be winners and others will be losers is not just inevitable, it's beautiful. The people that will lose out are losers already, parasites on the aristocracy of talent, surviving only when protected by corrupt governments smothering us from their citadels of mediocrity. Once we free ourselves from this tyranny, the best and the brightest will naturally rise to the top and the rest will . . . no longer bother us . . . .

If, according to the third position, there is nothing inevitable about any particular political and social arrangement, some options do seem more quickly self-limiting, e.g. the sexless communities of the Shakers, or the fossil fuel economy. We know from the Soviet Union and other theocracies that totalitarian societies with very extensive and expensive controls can last for generations. But even these are not immortal.

We can also point to historical episodes of justice and democracy to support the more aspirational statement. On the other hand, these seem daily more fleeting and fragile. We can be sure that always and everywhere people yearn to be free; but that's not all we yearn for.

Zero sum:

- There is a fixed amount of good in the world. Anything you get comes at my expense./
- There's enough to go around, provided that we share it fairly.

I grew up in New England. When I quit school in 1971, there were plenty of retail and manufacturing jobs; took me only a few days to get a job in an auto parts factory. I didn't have to know a boss, I didn't have to promise a kickback. I had colleagues who grew up in a small town in Kentucky. There competition was brutal for the few jobs available. Even a half century ago, at the peak of the American Century, their experience was more typical than mine.

For most of us, life is largely the experience of scarcity, and it's not just material things we lack. Sometimes even love, respect, recognition, or the opportunity to explore our own potential are mighty hard to come by. So for many of us life looks like a zero-sum game. The commonwealth means nothing to me. I can get ahead only by pushing other people down. Jealousy and competition become the central story of our lives, and the soundtrack of much of pop culture.

It's only a superficial contradiction that the parasites who promise endless prosperity right around the corner also often cherish a present-day society where benefits are few and rigidly rationed among fierce competitors. Their dependence on the assumption of limitless natural abundance seems to go hand in hand with insisting that we ration out social benefits with a miserly touch, so as not to spoil our naturally shiftless character with too much easy pickin's.

> Through the birth of the Tea Party to Obama phones and Obamacare, fear of losing out to the "47 percent" [the low income people GOP candidate Mitt Romney derided as whiny dependents] has pervaded and largely defined conservative politics since President Barack Obama's 2008 election. Much of the conservative base views demographic change as zero sum, with whites on the losing end (Wilkinson).

Rich people worry especially when their power depends on deep and wide networks of patronage, loyalty and favor. Hard to say which came first, scarcity or clientelism, but for sure this

form of control depends on scarcity and competition. Why would I suck up to El Patron if I can get a job on my own, or a loan, an education, a cab license or a building permit at the public agency across the street? But the boss likes it when we compete with other, individually and as members of groups.

I remember some middle-aged white women in my GED class. They'd had a rough time with poor education, low wage jobs, lousy partners and lousy bosses. But when in history class we came to consider the circumstances of black people, or immigrants, they didn't want to know. They competed even for oppression. If bosses hate honest government because it provides social services that free us from dependency, some of us hate government because we think benefits should come only through the personal favor of the boss, or because we should be first in line as white Christians. When any sick person or low income mom can qualify for benefits, regardless of race or religion, they become my direct competitors for limited resources.

And behind material goods and services lie the very rights to our place at the head of the line. So when when other people suddenly have access to resources formerly dedicated exclusively to white Christians, as happened in the 1960s and 1970s, many people felt diminished. If all my experience has been zero-sum, I understand that others get more stuff only by taking it from me. I lose my special status when everyone has the same rights. So the zero-sum model of the world fits closely with how we accept hierarchy.

Horwitz talked with Kentuckians during earlier battles over the Confederate flag:

> "I feel like the flag's the only thing working people like me have left . . . . All my life it's been one thing after another. First they integrated the schools. Then they integrated everything. Then they say 'colored' ain't right anymore, it's got to be 'black,' then 'African-American.' But nothing changes for us. We're still 'crackers' and 'peckerwoods' and 'rednecks.' I feel like I've swallowed enough for one lifetime" (Horwitz p.80).

Another woman says,

> "Blacks don't really have anything against the flag. They just don't want us to have it. They want the best jobs, the biggest money. Now they want this. If we lose the [high school Rebel] mascot, it'll just be a matter of time before we lose everything." Her voice quivered with rage. "Don't put us where they used to be" (p.99).

Our culture wars are so vicious because symbolic defeats threaten real, material loss. Folks who have abused others all their lives are very familiar with hunger and humiliation, having dished it out so often, and are perhaps especially fearful of retribution-- "Don't put us where they used to be." And we see in these responses the classic diversion of economic grievance to race hatred.

Of course, historically, the U.S. economy has not been a zero-sum game, else we'd still be living at the standards of 1776. New technologies let us make ever-greater use of resources in sometimes more efficient ways. The size of the pie has not been the problem, though I think we are fast approaching that point. Rather it's how our rulers choose winners and losers. Capitalists are fond of praising "creative disruption," which, they tell us, means long-term prosperity at the cost of minor temporary pain. Another way to put it, in a phrase sometimes attributed to Lenin: can't make omelets without breaking eggs. Unfortunately, as U.S. workers know all too well, a few people at the top get the omelet, and we get to be the smashed eggshells. Stock indices and the stats on national GDP make the economy look very sparkly, while the situation for many families and small communities remains very much zero-sum.

Freedom itself becomes a scarce commodity. Many of us see freedom as little circles of freedom of action surrounding each person, and butting up against each other, and bursting like bubbles on contact. My neighbor can only expand her freedom by encroaching on mine. I can only be truly free by living in the woods with my dogs, my guns, and my solar panel satellite internet; and woe to those who trespass!

The zero-sum idea is logically hard to square with our tendency to blame the victims of inequality, but of course if we admit the system generates losers, we have to have a story about why they deserve their fate, and why the rest of us shouldn't care. An unemployment rate of only 4% --took us a decade to drop to this rate after the great crisis of 2007-8-- translates into millions of people out of work. Yet we commonly insist that anyone willing to work can get a job. The competitive outlook necessarily generates myths of innate superiority and inferiority, worth and worthlessness.

A recent study reminds me of another facet of the 0-sum ideology, perhaps the most consequential. If I think that there's really not enough to go around, if it all boils down to a question of you or me, your success or mine, your life or mine, why then I am justified --obligated, really-- to take any action to further my success, or even save my life. I have no choice. The world is full of winners and losers, that's the natural way of things, and I'm a fool if I don't take every measure to be among the winners. Everyone is similarly ruthless, or should be. Only losers consider the other guy. For rightists, "survival of the fittest" is not an observation but a commandment, and an excuse.

Because such selfishness is so abhorrent, and undercuts the cooperation we really need to survive, authoritarians have developed an elaborate companion ideology about who we can gang up with and who the losers are, who does not deserve to succeed or survive-- see Who belongs? below.

Thus it makes perfect sense for authoritarian voters to have a high tolerance for politicians' lies and corruption, so long as these voters think the victims are someone else. Voter suppression by the GOP, GOP Senators' hypocrisy in handling court nominations, the President using the power of the federal government to persecute rivals and line his own pockets, the President's constant, apparently uncontrollable lying-- these are water off a shark's back for his base of white Christian supporters.

> "Right-wing authoritarianism captures the tendency to defer to legitimized authority," the researchers write. If, in your mind, your leader can do no wrong, it follows that he can lie with impunity.
>
> "Relatedly, people who score high in social-dominance orientation consider the social world as a competitive jungle," they add. It's easy to see how lying would be viewed as acceptable if you hold what the researchers describe as "the dog-eat-dog worldview where everyone does whatever is needed to get ahead."
>
> The researchers caution that these findings should not be overstated: Lying on the part of politicians was considered morally wrong by most people across the ideological spectrum. But people on the political right were far more likely than those on the left to disagree with this consensus,

> and this difference may allow Trump to lie without fear of losing their support (Jacobs 10-14-19).

It's reasonable to infer that the tolerance we show for our bosses' crimes will naturally extend to our own actions. When zero-sum is their guiding principle, authoritarians are dedicated liars and cheats. They don't mind killing, either, as long as it's someone else pulling the trigger, and someone else catching the bullet.

In a different conception, your freedom reinforces mine. The more power you have, the more power we have together to achieve our common goals-- and the less effort and dignity I have to expend to keep you under control. We have to invest time and energy into learning to work together, but the result is greater freedom for us all. The alternative to top-down patron-client systems is to share what we have more fairly, so that we are a little dependent on each of our neighbors, not massively groveling to the gangsters at the top. We still produce enough food to feed the globe, if we care to distribute it fairly (although we can't farm on this scale without wiping out hundreds of thousands of species). And for a brief period, after the labor wars, the New Deal, and the civil rights movement, we in the U.S. were putting in place food, housing and health programs that freed many of us to live with less fear.

Since Reagan the philanthropist class has been busy smashing that social safety net, as a threat to their power. There won't be much left for young people. We have not yet managed to maintain for long a system run by and for the people, rather than gangsters, but some folks are still working on it.

How we make things better:

- I improve my life by improving myself./
- I am better off when my community prospers.

It's big business, convincing us that as persons we lack something vital, and then selling us some book or CD that will guarantee us friends, inner piece, and shapelier buttocks. And it's true, we can improve our incomes, relationships and overall satisfaction by strengthening our skills and understanding.

However, that is not always necessary or sufficient. Fantastic talent goes to waste when systematic discrimination is built into the hiring process, or when whole industries are relocated overseas. An optimistic outlook has some positive affect on health outcomes, but not nearly as much as affordable health insurance. And some prescribed behaviors --take leadership of your family, distrust your neighbors, pay no attention to this corrupt world-- actually make our lives much, much worse.

We also know from very costly experience how murderous societies can be which demand that individuals totally suppress their personal needs for the good of the community (heavenly or utopian). This means, always and without exception, that we are supposed to sacrifice so the elite can live in luxury. We call these polities totalitarian.

So should we focus on changing ourselves or our situation? Some people work to enrich themselves and their community, too.

How we get other people to act right:

● Some people are naturally bad, and they are always going to choose the path of evil. Only God can change them. We can punish them, and must, to protect ourselves./

● We don't all have the same range of choices available. We change behavior by changing conditions. We make more choices available to people who now have few.

The first set of statements focusses on individuals and their motives. People do bad things because we are bad. We can exhort each other to be good, but some people are just bad and all we can do is pray for them and lock them away.

The second attends to mass behavior, and assumes that we act in response to a variety of influences. We don't all face the same range of choices, and, in terms of shaping behavior, motives matter less than circumstances. We know, for instance, that addicts find it easier to quit drugs when they quit hanging out with other addicts. Parents who read a lot are more likely to have kids who read a lot. White teachers are more likely to have low expectations of black students. Rich people are likelier to be healthy. Students falling behind their classmates are more likely to act out. People who have been abused as children are more likely to abuse others. We sow what we reap.

These outcomes are not true for everyone, are not inevitable, and certainly cannot be put up as excuses for individuals abusing others. When we want to change behavior on a large scale, however, we look at the numbers and the statistical relationships. This is a hopeful way to look at things, because all these conditions can be changed somewhat by policy. We can apply a range of penalties, opportunities and incentives, which may not change every harmful behavior, but can certainly reduce the incidence and the harm. Posting stop signs and speed limits on our highways do not at all relieve us of the personal need and responsibility to drive safely, but do absolutely and measurable improve safety and flow.

Education is an important way we change conditions. We can help each other get the skills and information we need to make good choices and achieve our goals. For some people, though, education is meddling. The government has no business sharing information about science, they feel, or health and social issues. Remember the uproar about Michelle Obama's efforts to promote more nutritious school lunches? How dare the government share information about children's health! A threat to diabetes everywhere. The anti-government folks see a political agenda behind public education, and they are absolutely right-- just as there is a political agenda behind efforts to keep us isolated, ignorant, fearful and dependent.

Across the board, rightists see attempts to address systemic problems in a systemic way as a threat to their ideology of moralism, blaming institutional failures on (others') personal choices, and refusing to accept limitations on their own personal freedom. They demand that others take personal responsibility while shrugging off any obligations themselves. More on this below.

Social engineering.

All of which brings us to the awful specter of Social Engineering-- the idea of using policy deliberately to change society. The term itself is an obscenity, anathema in some circles.

We have a lot of reasons to fear social engineering.

--Imposed top-down, as is most often the case, it can reinforce unjust power.

--Such programs may be carried out by outsiders, who know little about the local community, have little stake in it, and suffer few consequences for their failures.

--Some programs are too egalitarian; no-goods get the same treatment as I do, or better.

--They are too democratic, upset the apple cart. If we track workplace safety stats, I might have to spend more to keep my employees safe. We extend legal protections to immigrant workers, how am I going to keep my cheap labor force?

--They challenge the lies we tell our children: that we can only blame ourselves if we're poor; that money can't buy happiness; that government cannot help.

--At best social engineering is a blunt instrument, though more adjustable than the punishment policy. (Compare the blood-soaked failure of Prohibition with our current regime of education and treatment programs, women's shelters, taxing liquor and cigarettes, high penalties for drunk driving, etc. Compare the high costs of alcoholism in our society with the much higher cost of the long since lost zombie "war on drugs".)

Despite the real risks, we live in the midst of many social engineering programs-- interstate highways, universities, corporations, health insurance, globe-spanning social media surveillance programs . . . and, of course, the most durable of them all: religion. With vast networks of schools, hospitals, religious communities, social service agencies; programs of circumcision, gender segregation, prayer, architecture and music; efforts to organize billions of parents to teach billions of toddlers about Jesus, hell, Krishna, Ahura Mazda, women's place, the efficacy of prayer, who to kill and who to obey-- religion is social engineering on the grandest scale, second only to capitalism itself. Makes sense on one level for religious people to be jealous of rival social engineering projects, but they can't rightly complain about the ambition to change society.

Freedom, power, following the rules:

Our political opinions are closely tied to our sense of our own personal agency and power/lessness, in turn derived largely from our place in the socioeconomic system. You already know this: people at the top feel they have a lot of control over their lives, and ours too. People with family resources and prized skills feel more confident they can get what they want through their own efforts-- and feel correspondingly less need to accept any obligations of reciprocity that might limit their personal freedom of action. People with community skills and connections tend to cooperate to achieve shared goals. People on the edge often figure their best bet is to attach to some rich guy's entourage.

Let's look closer:

- There's little we can do about the major policies and institutions that govern our lives. We can tend our own garden, build a wall around it and hope the people with bulldozers don't notice us./
- Sure, he may think he has the power, but when I need to I can wrap him around my little finger./
- I'll be OK if I keep my head down and follow the rules./
- I can take care of myself. Get out of my way./

- I can manipulate and dominate others./
- We can work together to get what we need.

Our bosses push us around and tell us we're stupid. They lie to us about how the world works, adding to our confusion. No wonder so many feel so helpless. The gendered piece of imposed dependence and self-disparagement is particularly vicious --"a woman's place" and all that-- and astonishingly persistent in this supposedly post-feminist era. The constant storm of lies from Fakes News and the other millionaire talking heads is not designed so much to persuade us -- they'd have to toss in a grain of truth here and there to do that-- but to overwhelm us and make us give up on ever making sense of politics. Judging by what I hear from young people and others, the liars have largely succeeded.

Even those of us most despairing of being able to affect much the wider world, do usually figure we have a small sphere where we can operate undetected and somewhat independently, e.g. by managing family relationships or carving out little bits of time for our own interests. I've heard non-religious women say how impressed they are with the confidence and joy of religious women, whose family roles provide clear purpose, time-tested skills, rules for success, and wide community support-- so long as these women stick to their assigned tasks, and so long as the other premises hold true, e.g. that mom doesn't get sick, and dad doesn't get laid off or abusive, and sonny doesn't come back from the crusades in a body bag.

I've also heard women say that their boyfriends or husbands think they, the men, have the power, but that women really run the show behind the scenes. And it's certainly true, men in these kinds of relationships often depend on women to take care of day to day business. But the very fact that these women feel that their power must be hidden, that they must constantly coddle and flatter and lie to their supposed partners, indicates they are truly subordinate, and can challenge their bosses only on the margins if at all. It's another variety of thin privilege, the token rewards that persuade us we have a stake in the dominant order.

Some dwindling proportion of us have confidence that we'll be OK if we follow the rules. What the rules are, exactly, is not too clear, beyond work hard, be polite, don't take drugs, don't get pregnant, and stay the hell away from the police. The main thing is, there's a system, and if we learn to work it we'll be set for life.

And indeed, following the rules is a good idea, to the extent that many of the rules we live by represent the codification of millenia of observation and experiment. The law of gravity is a good one to pay attention to. We also have thousands of generations of experience as to which kinds of lies lubricate our relationships, and which blow them up.

We stick to the rules because we associate them with fairness and a level playing field. Experiments in game theory demonstrate that sometimes we will take a loss rather than see someone else take unearned advantage. For instance, we might turn down money for ourselves if it's coupled with someone else getting more for no good reason.

> Mrs. Clinton has proposed an increase in the minimum wage to $12 an hour, which would modestly increase the couple's income, but Mr. Klug said he planned to vote for Mr. Trump. He likes the idea of a businessman in the White House, he said.

> Moreover, he does not like the idea of a government-imposed pay increase. His wife has spent eight years climbing up to her current pay grade, he said, and it wouldn't be fair for workers who have just joined Walmart to be lifted to the same level" (Appelbaum et al).

When we feel we have earned our advantages by hard work and smart decisions, it seems unfair that others get the same reward for less effort (as if low-wage employees don't work hard). Some politicians' proposals to pay off all student debts would likely generate similar resistance-- one student is in hock to a community college for a couple thousand, another owes $100,000 to an elite law school. It's one thing to pass a law saying, Henceforth, the public will pay for your schooling, whatever program you choose to take. That way, although their choices may be constrained in other ways, everyone operates with the same information. But paying for kids' school choices retroactively reinforces class structure, and as usual the rich would reap the greatest benefits (particularly if the rich daddies and mommies continue to be able so easily to evade their tax obligations).

Observers attribute the unpopularity of the 2017 GOP tax cut to the same dynamic; many middle income families saw a slight drop in their taxes, but they knew the very wealthy would be sucking up millions (Federico). So we will often reject unfair deals even when it costs us to do that. Researchers suggest this punitive response can be useful in the long run, leading to clearer, more stable relationships. Some posit that the option of retaliation is a foundation of lasting cooperation (Fehr 1-10-02. See also *Economist* 8-13-11.)

One set of folks particularly devoted to the rules are some engineers, computer modelers and number-crunchers, who see in the numbers a purer version of our messy human interactions. Some call themselves rationalists, and feel very frustrated when we don't live up to their neat models.

Trouble is, most of the rules of society are bound to change, even in a world not constantly under assault by the barrel bombs of capitalist "creative disruption" (that's what billionaires call it when they torch a community or poison an ecosystem-- High 5, man! I just creatively disrupted the livelihoods of ten million farmers! Dude, that's nothing! I just creatively disrupted the ecosystem of a South Seas island paradise! Now it's a parking lot! We must be geniuses!) White men of my father's generation could expect to work for the same employer for twenty or thirty years, and planned their lives around that expectation. Probably not too long before that (but way before my time) old people were respected because they had experience actually relevant to the lives of young people. I know a woman just a little older than me, who expected all along to be a stay-at-home mom, and is stilled pissed off at the women who are not. When deeply-held expectations blow up up in our faces, a lot of us are left floundering.

Only now are the social scientists beginning to catch up to the reality of the devastation so many U.S. communities have suffered since since Clintonites of both parties decided that all an economy needs is fast food and finance (the former constitutes their jobs program for the 99%; the latter serves as a sort of soup kitchen for needy politicians).

> In rich countries, death rates are supposed to decline. But in the past decade and a half, middle-aged white Americans have actually been dying faster. Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton first

> pointed out this disturbing trend in a 2015 study that highlighted three "diseases of despair": drugs, drinking and suicide. . . .
>
> The problem of dying whites can't only be blamed on rising rates of drug overdoses, suicides and chronic alcoholism, they say. More and more, middle-aged white Americans are dying for all kinds of reasons — and the underlying issue may have less to do with opioids and more to do with how society has left behind the working class.
>
> -- Jeff Guo, 3-24-17

Some research relates these effects to rising inequality:

> Once a floor standard of living is attained, people tend to be healthier when three conditions hold: they are valued and respected by others; they feel "in control" in their work and home lives; and they enjoy a dense network of social contacts. Economically unequal societies tend to do poorly in all three respects: they tend to be characterised by big status differences, by big differences in people's sense of control and by low levels of civic participation (Yves Smith p.23).

When the rules suddenly change on us, it should be no surprise that some of the folks most committed to following the rules are also those most likely to feel resentful and oppressed. Torn from our certainties, denied without warning (or perhaps we were not paying attention) the status and economic success we were promised, seeing others less deserving by gender and race make off with the prizes that should rightfully be our own, mistaking the crimes of our leaders as our personal failure, unequipped for the new reality and ignorant of its rules, it's very common for us to seek a savior who will promise to restore all we've lost, and punish the evil outsiders who have so humiliated us-- even though he's lying through his teeth. Many Germans followed this path in 1933. Many people have done it since. We despair of figuring out the new dispensation, and fantasize instead about a world of personal omnipotence, delicious vengeance and boundless self-gratification without consequence: Trumpworld. Rather than join colleagues and neighbors to restore the power of the community, we feel drawn irresistably to the idea of unfettered personal power, as incarnate in the outlaw autocrat we so admire.

How we respond to these crises depends in part on whether we see rules and roles instrumentally, valuable insofar as they help us, or as stemming from some outside authority, more important than we are, and unchallengeable. Those with a high need for certainty will tend more to look to fixed rules to guide us. Others follow the rules so long as they serve us. We make new ones as needed. We can't hope for certainty about every step of our lives because life doesn't operate that way.

Let me make a homely analogy from my own experience. I used to teach English to immigrant students, so now and again I'd come across arguments about so-called Standard English. You may remember from your own school days teachers who would constantly correct the way you talk. A former colleague told me that when she was growing up in Tennessee, some of her teachers would complain about her language, which didn't sound like the old white guys on broadcast news.

So some insist on the rules of proper English, as if there ever were such a thing, as if English were not the rawest bastard of many languages, as if the rules themselves were more important

than the goal of communication, as if some great Authority invented our language and then Revealed to us the first book of grammar, as if those rules are fixed forever, as if the great stories and poetry and humor of the world were not powerful precisely because they play with language, bend and stretch and tie it in knots. Some people treat life this way, too, as a fixed path from which we dare not stray, but in truth life doesn't have any rules that we may not bend and stretch and tie in knots; that we may not play with and tear up when they don't work any more. And we ignore to our peril the fact that the gangsters themselves don't follow the rules they impose on us.

For some of us the rules include the expectation that white people will always be first in line, or that women will take care of men while men fondle their arsenals against the day the hordes of dark-skinned rapists come over the Wall. And when these calculations are upset, the shock is so great we pull the guns from our rectums and spray schools and shopping malls. Those smug little first graders have no idea what it's like to be a white man in the twenty-first century, hounded and hunted to the brink of extinction.

Many times we think compliance is safer than resistance, but that's not necessarily true. Adolf did not target the Germans who kept their mouths shut, even as he was rounding up socialists and Jews and gay people. But soon he herded all the nice obedient Aryans into a war that killed millions, flattened their country, and laid half of the survivors under Stalin's boot.

Closer to home, the folks who join the church of Trump may be in for a surprise, or several. So the safe option isn't always.

> "I believe that you can reach the point where there is no longer any difference between developing the habit of pretending to believe and developing the habit of believing." --Eco p.453

There's another aspect of following the rules. When rules are nothing more than demands imposed by elites, obedience may help us avoid immediate sanction at the cost of long-term servitude (for the luckiest). But these imposed rules always come with an ideology to explain why we must obey. Even when we start out very skeptical of authority, and obey only under compulsion, **the very act of obedience over time almost always generates ideological commitment as well.** It helps us maintain our sense of agency if we can justify our obedience with some reason other than sheer coercion. So great is our need for justification, even the flimsiest of excuses become nigh irrefutable. Only with an organized culture of resistance can we avoid this trap.

For instance, often we associate following the rules with **the idea of a just world:** the notion that, over the long run, the world will take care of good people. People who suffer are by that very fact shown to be fools, sinners or criminals. Unlike those provocative rape victims, I would never wear a skirt. Unlike those laid-off workers, I would never join a union. Unlike a cancer patient, I would never breathe polluted air or drink poisoned water. Unlike those stupid refugees, I would never get born in Syria. They got what they deserve. Good people might have to struggle a bit, but sooner or later the world rewards us because we're nice, obedient, and grateful for small favors. Above all, we follow the rules.

This is an astonishing conclusion, given that the world shows no indication whatsoever of recognizing good and evil, never mind using using such criteria to allocate rewards and punishments. But the just world hypothesis helps many of us paper over the contradiction of serving gangsters while wishing to be free. Almost as important, it helps us control our fear of the catastrophes that might fall on us at any moment. We're safe so long as we do what we're told. It's one short step further to conclude that the rules, the systems, the powers-that-be, the status quo are themselves just.

And so we react ferociously to political action that challenges our faith in the system and the rules themselves, such as "illegal" immigrants demanding citizenship, or young people of color demanding police accountability. "Don't break the law, you won't get shot!" our God-fearing, law-abiding, entirely coincidentally white middle-class neighbors shout in support of killer cops. Again, folks who challenge the rules threaten our justification for our own follow-the-rules life strategy.

Some of us acknowledge no rules but our own. We've made our own way in the world, despite the bureaucrats and useless hangers-on. We don't need others and certainly feel no obligation to them. Free us from these burdens! The libertarian fantasy that we can and must go it alone is not even an idea, it's a toddler's sensation of self-indulgent omnipotence, and has brought us the first toddler president.

Here again we're dealing with unacknowledged privilege. An awful lot of old people who depend on Medicare and Social Security also vote for politicians determined to wipe out pensions and the Affordable Care Act. Some people boosted into the middle class through public schools and colleges now insist that they owe their success solely to God and their own hard work. Some low income people getting tax cuts for their kids insist that government programs are for deadbeats, whilst rich people coddled by government from morn til night demand that low income people stand on their own two feet. These folks fancy themselves lone heroes living by their own strength and wit as they wander an apocalyptic landscape scoured clean of social resources. And they try their damndest to make their infantile fantasies come true for all of us.

Some of us feel plenty empowered, because, we figure, everyone else is stupid. This is the faith of the predators: we know how to push other people's buttons, deceive them, make them do what we want. They even take pride in their ruthlessness, as if narrowing their world to a series of crimes were some kind of great accomplishment. A common life form in the Mafia and religious broadcasting, on Wall Street and among political consultants. So beware politicians who talk about how stupid people are. They think you're stupid, too, and they think they can lift your wallet without you noticing.

Others figure that we can depend on each other. Almost all of us belong to social networks we can call upon for help when we need it. Some of these networks are very hierarchical, with a few people having a lot of control over the rest. But in some groups advantages and responsibilities flow more reciprocally, and the big decisions are shared. When a problem comes up at work or in the neighborhood, these folks' first instinct is to organize their colleagues or neighbors to figure out what to do.

As critical as individual rights are to democracy, democracy itself is a system of government, a way to come to decisions collectively. Individual liberties and responsibility to the community go hand in hand; neither can last long without the other. This has often been said by folks who want all the freedom and demand that the least powerful take all the responsiblity, but it's true nonetheless. We don't take responsibility for decisions we have had no part in making, and we can't protect liberties that the community does not recognize. The libertarian and anarchist idea that we can have freedom outside of community, outside of government, is a castle made of sand, and the tide is coming in.

Responsibility:

How we share responsibility is one of the key issues of living in community. What do we contribute in exchange for all the benefits? How we answer that depends on how we define our community, and how much power we feel we have within it.

- What can I do? I'm just the Little Guy./
- Why should I care? I don't owe you nothing./
- What's my community? That is, Who deserves my help?/
- What's my community? That is, Who can help me?/
- How can I save the world?

Once I went to Asia. Beggars got in the way. I didn't like the reminder how lucky I am, how what I spend in a day for fun could feed dozens of people. At the same time, I could see that even if I gave away all my money it wouldn't make a dent in the volume of hunger required by our politics. Never having been on the edge myself, I never considered that helping one person for one day could make a difference.

I remember one kid, maybe 8, maybe 12, hard to tell with such a scrawny person. Held out her hand and stared at me. No cute smiles or fawning; prolly she was too sick and tired to play her part correctly (though not so to speak fed up). I stared back until she went away.

About the same time, a former classmate visited another Asian country. He saw a guy lying unconscious in a street, and hauled him to a hospital.

I wonder now what other tourists do. Do they allocate $10 a day on a first-beg, first-eat basis? Do they dispense small change often, or paper a couple of times a day? Do they respond only to witty beggars, or prayerful ones, or kids, or old people, or sick people with particularly exotic afflictions? I just didn't respond to beggars at all; there seemed no way to choose.

If you're like me, you draw the lines of responsibility very close. I think most of us wrap concentric circles around ourselves, diminishing ripples of responsibility toward family and community and the great wide world. I wrote above about how we draw the lines between Us and Them.

Not surprisingly, our sense of responsibility varies closely with our sense of agency. At one time among social service agencies, locus of control was the catchphrase duh joor. It derived from the observation that many of the clientele were curiously reluctant to take responsibility for their

decisions. Often they would blame their problems on others (something middle class folks never do. And it's absolutely true that black moms on welfare wreck the economy and gay people cause hurricanes). So social workers would patiently teach addicts and pregnant teens and single mothers that "we" --they-- have to accept the consequences of "our" choices.

Without a doubt, accepting personal responsibility is an important practice for all of us. Even those with little power have some power. But too often the exhortations offer little sense that we need support to make the right choices, that we can shape our environment as well as survive it, that others have responsibilities to us as we do to them, that we have more power when we work together, and that part of taking responsibility is working together for the common good. Sometimes, in making a big deal of personal responsibility for ourselves, we shrug off responsibility for the neighbors. I look out for myself; let others do the same.

(Vance writes in *Hillbilly Elegy* that the Marine Corps changed his life by testing his limits, raising his expectations and teaching him that his personal choices mattered. He began to take control of his life. He describes on the same pages the daily, minutely attentive parenting the Marines provided, which made all the difference. Who woulda thought, Big Gummint raising life-battered kids, and doing a good job, too-- in order to send their young charges into battle. We develop confidence and the sense of personal responsibility within highly structured, supportive environments. We develop independence from our time as cared-for dependents. This is not a new discovery!)

A big danger in hierarchical society is that those of us way down the ladder of power will shrug off any responsibility for the good of our communities. Patron-client networks are expecially geared to absolve members of responsibility. Leave it to me! the boss says, while encouraging us to see our peers as competitors. Even in less cutthroat circumstances it's natural to reject responsibility for systems we can't control. We like to make sure the mighty hear of our disgust, if only indirectly, through gossip, rumor and ridicule (Scott 1990 pp.19, 142ff), but even those mechanisms end up targetting our neighbors more than our masters.

It may be that some of the 63 million who voted for President Trump in 2016 did not actually expect him to win --the system is rigged, dontcha know-- but used the campaign as a way to give the finger to people of color and the professional class both. (Took me a long time to understand the exceptional loathing many white Christians have for ex-President Obama, who incarnates both categories.) At least a couple observers report that, having won, some in Trump country don't actually believe our President can help them (Kruse; Cramer cited in Chotiner). They have given up. They see no way out of their misery, and no obligation to the nation they feel has forsaken them. They are just glad to see President Trump stick it to the Oppressor-- women, gay people, black people, Latinx, and the godless social scientists behind the curtain.

Or perhaps some were in a blind Samson mood: Bring it all down! --burning their own neighborhood in hopes the yuppie suburbs would catch fire, a kind of race riot by white people; our homegrown version of suicide vests. Think of the hundreds of guys each year who shoot women and schoolkids and then themselves, a parting frenzy of nihilism. One man called President Trump the savior and in the next breath said "I think we're going to see the end of the world in our generation" (Kruse); I heard a neighbor say much the same. Abandoned decades ago by both major parties, feeling they have no stake and nothing to lose, they might be happy to drive the system over a cliff. Why should others prosper while they suffer?

This is a world-wide problem. After the devastation of World War I and the Great Depression, the old aristocracies were no longer strong enough to impose their will; they could only sabotage democratic movements. This brought about the rise of fascism, the alliance of old authoritarian power with the new authoritarian, racist, nationalist mass movements.

Again today we reject our selfish and incompetent elites, but decades of neglect, subversion and outright sabotage --40 years of Reaganism, NAFTA, Mitch McConnell, Fakes News, the billionaires' Extreme Court, and the free flow of gangster money into our politics-- have undermined the foundations of democracy, from stable communities to labor law, social services, voting rights and the free press. Once again conditions are very favorable for the fascist project to reorganize the shocked and battered rank and file in service to gangsters.

We see kleptocracies triumphant almost everywhere, the alliance of corporations, gangster states, terrorists and religious and racist mass movements, through the financial system, misinformation and surveillance technology, and electoral politics. In the West citizens have little say in big policy --how we use and distribute resources-- but occasionally just enough power to throw a wrench into the corporate works. By mighty effort over decades we can occasionally win marginal concessions such as the Affordable Care Act. We can tip the balance among competing elites. But street demonstrations and the voting ritual do not give us the power to institute policies that really challenge the gangsters. So we register protest votes, do our best to disrupt business as usual, without taking responsibility for the outcomes. We can beat up outsiders and start trade wars, but we don't have the power to knit the world back together.

I fell in love with Pirate Jenny, Brecht's put-upon housekeeper who crows with delight when pirates attack and murder all the rich people. But the Apocalypse better snap it up. Otherwise, after we have slaked our thirst in the blood of our enemies we still got to pay the rent and get mom to the doctor, and we still don't know how to do that.

It's not just the most marginalized among us that shrug off obligation. I taught school for a while. Many of my colleagues were resolutely apolitical, even about issues that directly affected our students and our work. In addition to fearing retaliation for speaking out, they also had a convenient rationale: rather than making a fuss in public, they were changing the world from the classroom, one student at a time.

Then we have the empowered and entitled. The e&e often behave very much like those on the margins. Not surprising, when you think about it. If you've had your diapers changed all your life by immigrant women, you can't believe you shit, never mind that you should clean it up yourself. So at the other end of the power spectrum we see people with even less sense of responsibility. People who helicopter to their own private islands (or beachfront golf resorts) don't need to worry about bridges, schools, clean water, affordable health care and the like. Indeed, to the tiny extent that they can't evade taxes, what is life support for the rest of us means a few less golden toilet handles for them-- economically an annoyance, but emotionally a great pain. You can hear the howls of fury at any threat to their celebrity cooks, pet artists and stolen art, in-home spas, ceiling-height aquaria stocked with endangered species, armies of trafficked toilet scrubbers and lawn care serfs, designer drugs and their personal physicians to prescribe them, Walmart-size wine cellars, their monogrammed soap and toilet paper, their lemon-scented towel boys. It's the principle of the thing: How dare you try to grab back a decimal point of what I stole!

(Forests have been clearcut to supply the paper for books about the "culture of poverty"-- you know, all those personal bad habits and irresponsibilities that keep people from having rich daddies. Where is the sociologist who will study the pathologies of useless consumption? What is it that drives people to lie and cheat and pollute so they can have ten cars at ten homes with ten bathrooms in each? Perhaps the rich, being so full of it, really need all those toilets.)

After all, the essence of capitalism, from banks to coal mines to fast food chains, is to externalize costs and push the risk onto other people, whether it's through pollution, impenetrable investment scams, or foisting on taxpayers the cost of feeding their employees. Limited Liability Company, indeed! We actually have laws that forbid managers from acting in any way that will diminish profits for their investors, such as, I don't know, not pumping poison into the air and water. Generations of economists have been paid well to elaborate and sacralize the ideology of irresponsibility-- well, not so much ideology as puffed up indignant rant. A smidgen of bowdlerized Adam Smith, a bigger part contempt for women, people of color, low income people, etc. etc. Ayn Rand is often associated with the libertarian idea, but of course the gangster tradition goes back before history and requires no ideology. Three thousand years ago mendicant poets sang the praises of kings and other mass murderers, just as many business profs do today.

So it can be no surprise that these people tend to see their privilege as something they've earned. Food, water, power, medicine, roads, money, political rights . . . if noticed at all, these are regarded as unremarkable natural attributes, like the fingers on one's hands. The wealthy sprang fully-formed from the head of Zeus, radiant godlings. They feel little responsibility to maintain the social and economic infrastructure, though they fight fiercely to keep their position on top. Cozily attached inside our colons, bloating with our life's blood while we wither and die, they see themselves as heroic and fiercely independent. Devotees of the cult of individualism, they band together quite effectively to defend their privileges, while denying the same to the lower orders.

What's more, they see as illegitimate and a tyranny the limitations on their freedom posed by the mere existence of other people on this planet. In the midst of so many of the clamoring underclass, the Olympians can't fart and shit and spew to their heart's content. They have to be more careful than they'd like. They take such restraint as "political correctness," a great oppression. So sad!

Since everyone starts out with the same chance in life --absurd as it sounds, that's the bedrock principle of their claim to power-- the losers have only themselves to blame. The powerful have no obligations to anyone except, perhaps, each other.

No doubt rising seas will soon drown their offshore Edens. Then they'll move to mountaintops with new beach frontage.

More interesting to me are that subset of teachers, soldiers, bureaucrats and politicians who rail against entitlements and big government while living off taxpayer dollars; the old people who'd be dead without Medicare, begrudging health care to young people; workers and consumers who vote for the politicans busily dismantling the labor and environmental regs that are the only thing standing between us and the mutant wolves howling outside the door. I remember years back the news story of a white welfare mom, a fan of KKK politician David Duke, complaining about all those lazy welfare moms. I'm guessing that a lot of these kinds of contradictions can be attributed in equal measure to racism and a profound and willful ignorance about ourselves.

At the other end of the spectrum, I've met a few folks who diligently cultivate a sense of responsibility to all our fellow travelers on this globe. Nevertheless, I don't quite trust professions of universal siblinghood. O, sure, we say we love everyone, but where do we spend our money? What's the ratio of household spending on pets, say, to help for war refugees?

Help:

We see how our notions of responsibility play out when we respond to people in need, or don't. How can we really help?

- Helping people hurts them. It just encourages dependency. People need to stand on their own two feet. I don't mind giving advice, but I doubt they'll listen.
- I have no responsibility for what happens to others, but I might help someone get over a temporary setback-- if he meets my high standards.
- I might need help one day, and I want to be able to call on you. We help each other. We're all in this together, and we need each other.

All charity is self-interested, whether it be the reward of a smile from a child, safer neighborhoods, praise from our neighbors and a ticket to heaven, new members to our groups or customers for our products, well-paid do-gooder jobs, IOUs laid on people who can help us later, even that hundred million dollars that somehow found its way into the pockets of the Clintons as they schmoozed dictators on behalf of quake-stricken Haitians.

For me, random acts of charity have the added benefit of adorning and covering over my daily cruelty and selfishness: just because I'm an intolerant racist elitist dog in the manger doesn't mean I'm a bad person.

Some of us recognize how much we benefit from the help we give others, while some of us insist the flow goes only one way. One marker is whether the recipients have any say in what they get from us; do we give what they ask for, or is it only our castoffs and leftovers, or whatever we have decided they need?

Another indicator is what we demand in return for our generosity. We might require that the recipients take job skills classes, clean our toilets, or give up sex. Folks whose lifestyles depend on scamming their neighbors and poisoning the planet, it's amazing how readily they insist that sick, abused and low income people "take responsibility" for their illnesses or the crime and unemployment rates.

Above all, the targets of our charity must deserve it.

> "The central tension for the Tea Party grass roots isn't between the Big Brother state and the freedom-loving individual, or between inefficient government spending and effective free markets. Instead, Ms. [Theda] Skocpol and her fellow investigators argue that "Tea Partiers judge entitlement programs not in terms of abstract free-market orthodoxy, but according to the perceived deservingness of recipients." The fundamental distinction for them is not state vs. individual, it is the division of the United States into "workers" vs. "people who don't work" (Freeland).

Here's another example of how easy it would be to get diverted into abstract debate about economic and political theory, when the real concerns are simpler and very familiar: race and class and gender.

We *should* take pride in our hard work building things and taking care of people. We should delight in our cleverness. At the same time, we have no reason to suppose we are exceptionally virtuous. We may not see the work other people do. Maybe we don't think of it as work, such as raising children. Instead we use markers like wealth to decide if someone is worthy or not-- a kind of circular argument that goes, He's rich, so he must work hard, so he deserves to be rich.

Perhaps the demand for deservingness is a poor substitute for missing systems of accountability. Before megalopoli, when our ancestors didn't like the way someone acted, they could stop dealing with that person, and the offender gradually lost vital long-term social and business connections. In a society of strangers, those mechanisms barely operate any more, and the criminal justice system is too peripheral, inefficient and unjust to serve in their stead. The requirement that people in need prove they deserve our help does have one big advantage over accountability within relationships of mutual interdependence: I can question others' worth without ever having to prove my own. This kind of charity is less about helping people than demonstrating my own superiority. And it gives cover to our support for harmful and discriminatory public policy.

For sure it's not to correct systemic problems. After all, the system works pretty well. Once in a great while, through no fault of their own, people like us run into unforeseeable problems, and when that happens we might help them out a bit-- if it suits us.

> What is most needed for the poor is charity. A fair system is, after all, a harsh system because some well-intentioned people will always suffer misfortune. Thus, the biblical mandate of "helping the fatherless and widow" comes into play. Mercy enters the picture where justice leaves off. It is concerned more with helping the downtrodden [get] back on their feet, rather than preventing them from falling in the first place. It requires individual attention, kindness, and compassion. . . . Banker Harold Bentley . . . implicitly believes most poor people, for whatever reasons, are not interested in being self-sufficient. There's always going to be some people that are poor. A lot of it can be self-inflicted. They've caused their own problems. And no matter what you do, you can give everybody money, have them on like a social security type check. Some are going to blow it and they're always going to be poor. Sometimes they don't have a good sense of values. Don't have a good work ethic.
>
> (Wuthnow 212-13)

Others see helping the poor is not just useless, but an active evil: "Fostering the good-for-nothing at the expense of the good is an extreme cruelty" (Margaret Sanger, cited in Okrent p.246).

Guys like Harold would find very offensive the suggestion that everyone deserves the necessities of life, regardless of whether or not they finish school, stay married, mow the lawn every week and thank their superiors for crumbs brushed off the table.

§ <u>Strategies, toolkit</u>.
If we believe that other people are wicked, not to be trusted, and are trying to steal our stuff; that mysterious forces control the world; that only by forcing folks to act morally can we fend off chaos, then there are several strategies we can pursue to protect ourselves.

**** Withdraw, hide.** James Tiptree, Jr. wrote a science fiction story about a couple of women who hitch a ride on an alien starship.

> "What women do is survive. We live by ones and twos in the chinks of your world-machine. . . . Think of us as opossums, Don. . . ."
>
> She'd meant every word. Insane. How could a woman choose to live among unknown monsters, to say good-bye to her home, her world? . . . Two of our opossums are missing.
>
> -- "The Women Men Don't See"

Turns out James Tiptree was a pen name for Alice B. Sheldon. After caring for her ailing husband for many years, she killed him and herself.

I met a guy once, a student in GED class-- quiet, compliant, sat in the back, went through the motions, answered questions in monosyllables, volunteered nothing. He was one of several teens bussed in from a half-way house, most of them there on drug or sexual assault charges. He was determined not to be noticed. His strategy was to fly below the radar, while enemy fire sliced the sky and storms raged above, maybe including his own emotions. Like many of us, he was trying to survive in the cracks in the structure, tiny gaps here and there where the authorities can't see and can't reach, crickets in the basement. Not a very abundant existence. Certainly there's not room there for everyone; the person who hides counts on the rest of us to be running around out in the open, easy targets, taking up all the predators' attention.

There's a political equivalent to this strategy: withdraw from the public arena, let others fight the battles and take the losses, hope that the bosses' voracious eyes will fall on others first. It seems impossible to fight authorities both mighty and at the same time unfathomable, nonsensical. How can I possibly satisfy powers so plainly deranged? No doubt Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine comes into play here: people battered by the series of economic and environmental crises have few resources with which to challenge the crisis-makers, or even to understand what hit us.

I see lots of disengaged folks. Leftish politicians promised for years that their vision would attract new legions of formerly alienated voters, but did not. I was especially discouraged with the young people in my family, though that is changing. President Trump's reign may have mobilized more new voters, for and against him, than all the Bernie Sanders crowd managed over decades. Even so, many still see little point in the hard, risky, messy work of politics. This outcome is no accident. Alienated voters been given a good, deliberate shove.

Long before Putin's legions of cyberstalkers infected our screens, homegrown "consultants", bloggers, and alt-facts funders have been busily sabotaging democratic discourse. It is commonly understood, for instance, that the goal of opposition research during political campaigns is not so much to persuade voters to choose one side or the other, but to discourage young and low income voters from voting at all. In that the saboteurs have been very successful. "They all lie," people

say of politicians, meaning, “We have no way to distinguish lies from the truth,” which also means, “We have no way to advance our own interests.”

There is as well a long-standing religious tradition of withdrawing from this wicked world. Seems like we cycle through periods of activism, exhiliration, disappointment, and retreat. I like Ireland’s description of a Pentacostalist in Brazil:

> Severino's discussion of his father’s, his own, and his neighbors’ experiences adds up to a harsh critical analysis-- of the working out of greed among landowners and of the corruption that binds government institutions to serve the greedy. In his moral critique, he clearly perceives what is happening to small *agricultores,* and the poor in general, as landowners ignore their responsibilities and operate according only to the dictates of greed. . . .
>
> His vision of salvation history and his conviction of the intractability of evil in the man-made world contain his radical diagnoses so that they do not flow into protesting action. When his neighbors ask his advice on how to cope with expulsion from the land, he urges them *näo fazer questão* (not to make an issue) with the landowner. Not the least of his reasons is the practical consideration that they will lose in any confrontation. This is argued partly on the basis the landowner is ruthless, prepared to use armed ex-prisoner *pistoleiros* to shoot protesters; he has the local judiciary and police in his pocket; and the people have only hoes and voices for defense. But even behind such practical, local considerations is a general principle: "The world is of the powerful," Severino often says. "If you have, you're worth something; if you don't have, you're worth nothing. That is the way the world has been since the Fall and that is how it will be until Christ comes again." One corollary of this bleak mythology is left unstated by Severino— the absence . . . of any this-worldly utopian vision. Severino's vision provides no images of an alternative world that might motivate active protest against the recognized injustices of the world. . . .
>
> [God] defines justice and will achieve it at the end of time. In the meantime, the just man does not presume to define and do as God. Rather, under the incessant scrutiny of God, he prepares himself and those for whom he is immediately responsible, family and neighbors, to be considered worthy of Divine justice. . . . God does not call on the just man to struggle for the setting up of the New Jerusalem but only to prepare himself to be of the righteous who will inhabit it. . . .
>
> I had thought that, after his heated denunciation of the local landowner for his unjust treatment of *sitiantes*, Severino might at least have considered that the landowner had lost his right to his land. . . . But Severino was astonished by this lead in my questions. To him, there was no question but that someone who had paid for land and completed the legal formalities of transfer was the owner, with rights that could not be negated by his injustices. God might punish him, and sooner rather than

> later. But no man had the right to take issue with his ownership and consequent right to dispose of the land as he would. . . . focusing on the moral order that is at once so real and so distant, Severino interprets his personal and group status in such a way that he is both critic of the rich and defender of hierarchy and the procedures that establish it (pp.56-9).

That is to say, we can't change much about this wicked world, but we can turn our eyes to heaven and hope God calls us there. In the meantime, those who suffer can take comfort in the thought of a world "transformed by God. Some say by fire, others by rains. But God's own word is that it will be fire. When He says it will be done, it will be done according to His words. And He said it will burn. And so all that is evil will disappear. . . . It is said that nobody will live in a place that he doesn't own" (p.58). I dare say many of us here share that aspiration.

** **Walls** are the architecture and monuments of withdrawal. Private schools, gated communities, highways girdling the "inner city" --we know what "inner city" means-- and of course The Wall our big-hands President insists on enlarging and plunging into the throbbing heat of the Southwestern landscape. Walk the neighborhoods in some Southern countries, the walls tower over bleak and broken streets, maybe some barred windows high up. The homes are fortresses, and community a furtive act taking place out of sight.

Sometimes the toughest barriers are intellectual. "I don't want to know," someone will say, and wave his hand dismissively. New telecomm, far from liberating us as promised by the technocultists, makes it easier than ever to huddle in online enclaves of the like-minded, gorging on the same mis/information and mangled models of reality. (Mandatory, even. Social media surveillance software locks us into categories and then feeds us what it calculates we want. Like a lover reassuring us about the size, firmness and surpassing attractiveness of our private parts, the algorithms confirm all our prejudices. See! I was right all along!)

The world does nevertheless intrude, rubbing our faces against the dirt and gravel of absurd assumptions and failed expectations. Sometimes we get it, and get up off our knees. Sometimes, more threatened by the prospect of losing our certainties than by the demands of reality, we expend ever more energy to build higher walls. Divert power to the shields! Being so ingenious, we can fend off the truth for years, convinced that immigrants and gay people cause layoffs, divorce, cancer, bank failures, floods, the rain of fire and the plague of locusts. By the time we have to admit what we see with our own eyes, it may be too late to change course.

** **Distract, deceive, get over: Tricksters transgress but do not overthrow.**

Darnton describes popular culture in 17th century France. For peasants and city workers alike, the world was scary and chaotic. They had little traction in their lives, few ways to anticipate or cope with the apparently random opportunities and disasters that came their way. The trickster was their hero. He could beat the system by sheer nimbleness. His greed often got him in trouble; then he used others' greed to get himself out. Outwitting the king and all the big shots, sometimes the trickster got the princess and half the kingdom. On hearing these stories our delight comes as

much from seeing the powerful revealed as no wiser, braver or more truthful than the rest of us, as from seeing one of our own make good for a change.

> If the world is cruel, the village nasty, and mankind infested with rogues, what is one to do? The tales do not give an explicit answer, but they illustrate the aptness of the ancient French proverb, 'One must howl with the wolves.' Roguery runs through the whole corpus of French tales, though it often takes the milder and more agreeable form of tricksterism (54).

Tricksterism is a way to walk in the world and yet defy it. Many cultures have their honored tricksters, from Bre'r Rabbit to the Native Americans' Coyote, Chile's Pedro Urdemala, the mouse deer of Indonesia and Eshu among the Yoruba (see Lewis Hyde's exhilirating treatment, Trickster Makes This World). Tricksters can represent defiance of authority, overcoming limitations, or the possibility of bargaining with the gods. I love the old cartoons where Bugs Bunny befuddles Elmer Fudd with kisses, and causes him to shoot up his own house. Though Brecht's play Caucasian Chalk Circle is a thinly veiled rationale for some of Stalin's crimes, the accidental judge Azdak remains my favorite literary character.

> And he broke the rules to save them
> Broken law like bread he gave them
> Brought them to the shore upon his crooked back.
> At long last the poor and lowly
> Had someone who was not too holy
> To be bribed by empty hands: Azdak.

As Darnton points out, tricksterism makes no pretense of changing the world or overthrowing the powers. Our hero, still smelling of the sewer, merely sneaks their way into the boudoirs and treasuries of the mighty. If more people adopted a trickster posture against our masters, at least it would be a way to preserve the sense that we are separate from the gangsterhood, and owe them nothing but deceit. Next time the power structure falters, that understanding could come in handy. Otherwise it is very hard to kneel and bow our heads, day after day, without finally coming to adore our masters, and the idea of mastery.

> Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. --Ralph Ellison

In real life, of course, it's a lot less risky to rip off our neighbors than to try to scam the powerful. Among authoritarians, any lingering culture of defiance has been thoroughly defanged & domesticated, lobotomized, purged of wit, transformed into myriad profit centers through fantasy personas like Rambo, "Rogue" Sara Palin, "straight-talking" Billionaire Trump, vigilante cops on TV who slaughter bad guys despite the criminal-coddling bureaucrats, TV millionaires boldly defying political correctness, homophobes for religious freedom, "liberated women" fronting for sexist advertisers, and a slew of chubby gangsta rappers. Instead of challenging our

lords, the smug new "outlaws" threaten or terrorize women and people of color, pointy-head professors (the secret rulers of the galaxy, as everyone knows), health care workers, labor and environmental activists, and the harried gnomes slaving away in the twilit basements of our self-spayed civil service.

**** Compartmentalize: Divorce intent and action from result.**

Metzgar writes about the need to persevere in our efforts even when we can't entirely control the outcome:

> "My father had a more complicated view of things than our shame-and-blame culture allows. First, bad things were a part of life; they were bound to happen, no matter what you did or didn't do. If you were smart, you 'played the percentages,' which meant that some percentage of the time you'd turn out to be wrong. Therefore, it was inevitable that you made mistakes, that you went too far and had to be corrected by others. It was impossible to be too hard on others' mistakes, or on your own, because people were simply reacting to someone or something based on their own (necessarily limited) experience and what they had learned from that experience. What mattered was diligence and perseverance—doing your best and hanging in there. He, like other adults in my neighborhood, liked to quote the sportswriter Grantland Rice's maxim: 'It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game.'. . . In my neighborhood, Rice's maxim was about doing your job well, playing your role, holding up your end, pulling your own weight in a game that would be determined by such a complex confluence of actions and reactions that no one person or group could be held accountable for the outcome—while everybody was always completely responsible for how they did their job. It's what sportscasters today often call 'a blue-collar attitude.' . . . If you did that and lost, it was both sad and painful, but you had at least done your job (2000, pp. 131-2).

It makes sense to be modest about what we can achieve in the world, and to persist even in the face of failure. There are so many variables outside our control, we may fail even when we follow the right strategy; and we may succeed through hard work, even though we take a lot of wrong turns along the way. Political work in particular is notoriously hard to assess, because it takes years at least to effect lasting change, and how do you define success, anyway? So, many folks keep plugging away, year after year, even when the returns seem meager. An anti-abortion activist expresses a common sentiment, saying, "Well, at least let our voice be heard. You feel so much freer and know you've done the right thing to just call and let your voice be heard" (Smith 110).

Sometimes, though, we focus so closely on our own limited sphere of responsibility that we lose sight of how our work fits the big picture. In the run up to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq President Halliburton told the generals, Just chase away the Taliban and kill Saddam Hussein.

Don't bother your pretty little heads about what happens next. The generals clicked their heels and shouted, Yes sir! and went off to play with their shiny toys. Did a single commander ask his boss, What happens after we wipe the power structure in these places?

As it turns out, the president didn't worry about the next step either. President Cheney immediately abandoned Afghanistan to send troops to Iraq, along with a bunch of Young Republican twenty-somethings, to run that country without knowing a word of Arabic, or anything else about the place. As of this writing we are still at war, many years, hundreds of thousands of casualties, and trillions of dollars later.

This extreme compartmentalization can also bring us to value our intent more than the real-world goal. Thus a lot of folks excused Halliburton's murderous Iraq blunders, saying, We can't blame him. He sincerely believed he was doing the right thing. Sincere! Who cares? Since any of us can easily persuade himself to believe that anything he does is right, this formula is not a very reliable mechanism for accountability. We torture suspects to defend democracy. We slash social programs to help sick and low income people become independent. We waste and poison our resources to protect jobs. We destroy the village to save it.

One recovering racist notes that a lot of racists don't feel themselves full of hatred. Rather, they feel that discrimination is logical and based on the (false) evidence they can marshall, and that therefore there's nothing wrong with the harm they do. "'Hate' and 'bigotry' in their minds, might be solely associated with deep personal loathing— not the consequences of their actions, or the things that they believe or say. If 'bigotry' means an internal feeling to them, then they don't believe that they are bigots" (JShCD15).

Once we cast aside consequences we can justify any action. Especially for people in power, those who decide how long we get to live and how much we pay for the privilege, we oughtn't let the argument about intent distract us from the real issues, such as taking responsibility for the damage they cause, and stopping.

When we separate intent from results, often times our actions take on the character of ritual, functioning more to reassure us than to solve problems or effect change. In times of crisis, and especially when we don't know what to do, doing something --anything-- helps us feel we're in control even when we are not. Years ago, psychologists experimented with pigeons. They found that whatever the birds were doing when food first dropped into their cages --walking clockwise, bobbing their heads, etc.-- they continued to repeat over and over, though it had no effect at all on how much food they'd get, or when (Wade and Tavris p.219).

At least the pigeons did get fed. But sometimes we keep doing the same thing even when it doesn't work. Where I live the default political activity is to gather in a public place and stand in circles waving signs at each other, our backs to the community. Not as a culminating public expression of a long campaign in the community, understand --the word for demonstration in Spanish is *manifestacion*-- but as our first and last steps. We take turns making long speeches to ourselves. Perhaps this is a legacy of our Christian upbringing, where redeeming the world is entirely in Jesus' hands. What's left to us is to bear witness. Sometimes our good intentions are what comes to matter to us most, no matter how the world responds (or does not).

Moralize.

Moralism is the dominant way we express this divide between intent, action and real-world results, with the added ingredient of valuing individual virtue and salvation over the life of the community. We insist that "good" and "evil" are qualities that exist outside of our minds, and use them to characterize intent and action, quite independent of the real-life consequences to ourselves or anyone else. We claim that our own standards of behavior are universal and absolute, and demand that those around us meet them, regardless of what they want and need. We persist in this demand whether others conform or not, whether or not their moral behavior makes our own lives better.

Further, moralism is a prescription for individual action which largely excludes social causes and context. For any given morality to work at all everyone must conform, but moralizers dismiss the very idea (though not the practice) that social forces should affect our inner moral compass.

We all subscribe to one or another moral code. They are the rules and common practices by which we organize our communities. They tell us what we should be doing and what we can expect from others. Morality also defines whom we are permitted or obliged to rape, rob and kill. Moralism recasts these contingent, constructed behaviors as eternal, divinely sanctioned laws, separates them from needs and goals, and damns those who differ.

Do-gooders too often appeal to morality, when we can think of no other reason why anyone should care about layoffs, discrimination, war. That's immoral, we say, as if the very label will somehow suddenly make us turn away from the crimes we have been committing or accepting for ages. We are especially tempted to use this placeholder explanation when we feel that our role as professional-class white people is to help the underprivileged. All those terrible things happen to someone else, and we care only because of our conscience compels us. Sometimes we have no clue that we ourselves have a vested interest in justice and democracy.

We can't get along without rules. We need to know what to expect from each other. But rules handed down to us play a different role in the community than those we come up with and agree to among ourselves. And standards that apply only to individual intent and behavior offer very different results than a set more attentive to the actual effects and outcomes of our policies and institutions, from church to Wall Street.

When we moralize problems we frame them as each individual's choice between good and evil. The goal may be salvation; the means is personal rectitude. It's a one size fits all approach that reduces all problems to individual intent and behavior. Moral dualism forecloses any further explanation or exploration of why others (or we ourselves) act the way we do. It's a formula for willful ignorance. And rather than devising solutions together to address specific shared problems, our job becomes compliance to standards imposed by others.

We can usefully look at morality as a set of claims we have on each other. To whatever extent we acknowledge our own responsibility to do right, we insist much more that others must do right by us. Parents and children, employers and employees, charity givers and recipients, we all have expectations of right behavior from each other. We base our claims on these relationships, which makes questions of status more consequential than mere prestige.

Illogically but practically, we recognize that people with a lot of power feel little responsibility for the rest of us. That doesn't mean they owe us nothing.

A thousand years ago peasants would rise up en masse against particularly rapacious lords, those who violated even the very minimal obligations they had to their tenants. And that made

sense when the local duke or emir was landlord, loan shark, cop and judge combined, and acknowledged a weak but time- and church-sanctified responsibility to his serfs.

Capitalism has freed us from such primitive ideas. The institutional pressures on corporate managers in a market-driven society are such that the only obligations they recognize are to investors. When they cut wages, pollute rivers or robotize thousands of jobs, they refuse to acknowledge personal responsibility. It's the market, they say.

Personal relationships still dominate wherever too many people compete for too few opportunities, but the rich have all the leverage. We offer obedience and loyalty in return for security, but anyone can offer that. Any favor the boss grants us today can easily be transferred to some other wannabe tomorrow. The obligation all flows upward.

I don't know whether anyone has looked into the cases of corporados doing the right thing, at cost-- switching to renewable power sources, for instance, or shunning deals with gay-bashing politicians. A very few have begun to limit advertising on overtly racist platforms like Tucker Carlson. We see these stories once in a while, newsworthy because so unexpected. Some of these decisions may indeed stem from the bosses' personal convictions, though there are always economic justifications as well. But absent systemic penalties and rewards, we cannot count on the powerful to address problems with anything like urgency or consistency. Scientists sounded the alarm on climate change over a generation ago, yet we continue to squander energy massively, on trifles, and we've probably already missed the window for limiting runaway climate change. Plenty of investors and CEOs continue to spend billions to protect rapists, racists, homophobes, polluters, war profiteers and other criminals. Moral Majority and Moral Mondays notwithstanding, moral obligation is virtually impossible to enforce among the bosses, except by democratic collective action-- which the focus on personal salvation in the hereafter actively confounds.

So what might be keeping us attached to the moral approach? Moralism appeals to us on several counts.

We like certainty, and we like unity. The moralistic approach lets us pretend for a while that we'll always know the right choice to make. It lets us imagine that everyone shares our understanding of the obvious, eternal truth, thus confirming our own righteousness.

Moralizing problems helps us conceal our power and justify our privilege. My own good fortune has nothing to do with race or class or gender, or exploitative economic systems; I earned my success through self-discipline, hard work and constant devotion to the hire power. The standards I have adopted as a middle-class white boy, or as a North American Christian, should apply to everyone everywhere.

The moral view lets us limit our responsibility: since each of us, slave or tycoon, is capable of making the right choice, when we get in trouble, it's mostly our own fault. If you want better wages, just become a corporate lawyer-- it's all up to you. If you fear planet-wide climate change, why, you can ride a bike. Concerned about the cost of health care? Eat right and stop smoking.

But even if we are blameless, we should look past our suffering to the prospect of heaven. This planet is anyhow ugly, corrupt, a vale of tears; our time here is meaningless except as a trial for the righteous; we must look to eternity. In the great eternal scheme of things, our worldly

circumstances don't matter; what's important is that we behave in ways to ensure our place in the afterlife.

While some moral systems encourage charity for the needy, generally we are not responsible for the outcomes. What matters is the merit we earn by giving, not whether our gift makes any actual difference to the people who need help. Heaven looks as favorably on a can of peas donated to the local food bank as policies for affordable housing and full employment; perhaps moreso, since the peas are immediate, tangible, and precisely priced. Most meritorious of all is a gift to our pastor; he knows best which starving widow deserves that can of peas.

Moralizing attracts the less well-off, too, as a means of reasserting our sense of control, as we are buffeted by nature or arbitrary bosses. "[P]eople often would rather feel guilty than helpless," Pagel writes (p.146).

> One may know perfectly well the statistical possibilities concerning natural disasters, freak accidents, and life-threatening diseases and regard these --theoretically at least-- as fully natural phenomena. But when such events suddenly threaten (or spare) one's own life, questions occur, so to speak, in the first person. . . . guilt, however painful, offers reassurance that such events do not occur at random but follow specific laws of causation; and that their causes, or a significant part of them, lie in the moral sphere, and so within human control (p.147).

Likewise, although we might feel helpless to influence the culture and big institutions, most of us can still manage our bodies and our behaviors. We can pray or study more. We can curb our eating, dancing, fucking. Very few of us can't scrape up a few pennies for church, or a goat to sacrifice. These practices can give us a sense of accomplishment, even as the wider world crumbles, and even hungry people can enjoy that special thrill of moral superiority. Atonement comes to feel like empowerment. Sometimes, though, even a hundred slaughtered goats won't fix what's wrong. Atonement can't help if we're not at fault.

Finally, many of us simply don't like the alternative: systems that allocate rights and resources via broad rules that make little distinction among participants. For instance, our public programs for health insurance, food assistance and social security have eligibility requirements, but otherwise cannot distinguish between the virtuous and the slackers, and have no way to recognize or register the value of our individual lives. We might draw benefits according to our need or our privilege, but they bear little relationship to whether we're good or bad. What matters most is mastering a set of confusing and often contradictory rules, which parse our lives into incoherent segments and leave little room for negotiation. The person behind the desk may not even raise her eyes from the screen, as she shoves our case file into a folder with hundreds of others. If moral standards can be a one size fits all prescription, public services can be scarcely less clumsy.

For sure, having food, shelter and a disposable income always affords us more freedom and respect than having nothing. But in the moral scheme of things, we don't deserve handouts. We should earn what we have. We don't feel worthy if we can't offer something in exchange.

Moralism fits very nicely with market ideology, and is central to the attitudes we sometimes call individualism. It means that even bureaucracies that feed us leave a big hole in our hearts. Rightists complain about the nanny state; but it seems their real objection is that the bureaucracies cannot love us.

Thus, many of us prefer a daddy who, however stern and remote, pats us on the head once in a while. While (honest) bureacrats have to live by the rules, big daddy makes the rules and can set them aside. He can give us a break when we break the rules or don't fit the categories. Life is anyhow much messier than the bureaucratic boxes. The Virgin intercedes for us in heaven, sinful though we are. Without organizing skills for collective action, we need our local champions, too.

Riesebrodt, comparing religious fundamentalists in the U.S.A. and Iran, suggests that political conflict today arises in large part from the loss of those old personalized systems of accountability and recognition.

> Depersonalized (and therefore morally vacuous) bureaucratic structures appeared to both Protestant and Shi'ite fundamentalists as tyrannical institutions exercising illegitimate power over the individual. Modern large-scale industrial enterprises and unions —"big business" and "big labor"— as well as the modern state bureaucracy were regarded as reprehensible from a religious-moral point of view. Fundamentalism's economic ideal is the small enterprise organized along personalistic-patriarchal lines as the cornerstone of an economy regulated by religious moralism.

On this reading, morality means, above all, moral order. We seek our rightful place in the beloved community. Filing us away under a case number shows us nothing but contempt.

To the extent moralism contributes to clientelism, it can also lead us to worship criminals-- and I don't mean the one they crucified.

I think there's an easier way to distinguish friend from foe. Rather than try to read minds, with a little homework I can tell pretty accurately whose actions help me, and whose actions hurt. I don't care about whatever excuses the bosses come up with. I care about how their choices affect me and the people I like. By their fruits shall ye know them.

Other consequences:

● We pay a high price to enforce unnatural standards.

It's a lot easier to choose between good and evil than to make complicated calculations among many goals with limited information. But imposing the moral frame on a very complicated reality brings other costs. We don't have much say in moral obligations; they come to us from traditions largely imposed by priests and patriarchs, and designed for their benefit, not ours. We have little incentive to follow rules that don't serve us, so they can be very expensive to enforce. Rightists like to point to traditional societies as orderly Edens in contrast to our own, but in fact they have always been riven by constant conflict. Look at Iran. Whatever moments of peace they achieve are the result of ethnic cleansing, systematic torture and the brutal suppression of women. I think of the vast, unnecessary suffering in societies where doubt is blasphemy, divorce is a crime, and people can't choose careers and partners for themselves.

● We focus on behavior rather than results.

Since we are not always in the position to convert, enslave or kill the people in our way, we accommodate ourselves to failure by recommitting to behaviors that demonstrate our virtue, whether or not they help us manage the challenges we face.

When we moralize problems, we insist on following (at least, that others follow) prescribed standards of behavior, without specifying any aim beyond the behavior itself. We rely on coercion (because the wicked will always disobey), and failing that, exhortation, rather than changing the structure of choice or the schedule of incentives.

In some systems we expect each other to act according to our interests, which are fairly predictable, and we persuade each other to change by making it worth our while to do so. We reduce tobacco addiction through education and taxation. Moralists, too, use plenty of sticks and carrots, but their underlying presumption is that we are supposed to act right because it's right.

● We overlook systemic problems, causes and solutions.

However much we might yearn for the good old days (good for whom?), the moralizing instinct renders too many problems invisible, and impoverishes the available alternatives. In 2017 the president's spokesperson Huckabee Sanders denounced Chicago's high murder rate. Clearly the people of Chicago must be much more wicked than those in Congress and the White House. When asked about easy access to guns, she said instead that immorality caused the shootings. Meantime the president's man at the Justice Department was rolling back his predecessor's attempt to rebuild trust between police and communities through better policing practices (Wing), while the secretaries of education and housing were busy dismantling those departments.

When we moralize problems we dismiss systemic causes and solutions. We ignore the tradeoffs among limited resources and sometimes conflicting goals. Morality can't tell us when and how to regulate markets, families, immigration or free speech; raise wages, prices or interest rates; allocate funds among many needs; design effective education programs; surveil citizens or go to war. Morality offers no way to judge the claims of drug companies, lobbyists or women who have been assaulted. The people who claim a moral basis for their choices go in completely different directions on all these issues.

Instead of tackling the failures of our policies and institutions, moralizers see only failed people. Smith refers to religious beliefs

> that the world's problems are ultimately rooted in spiritual problems residing in individual human hearts; that solving those problems requires an inner spiritual transformation that cannot be forced but only comes through voluntary personal religious conversion; and that the most effective strategy for real social change, therefore, is personal evangelism, for which the most effective tactics are building personal relationships with unbelievers, living good examples, and sharing the gospel at opportune moments. (115)

By this logic, aside from promoting religion, there's not much we can do policy-wise. All problems come down to bad people, and all or most of us are bad, helplessly so-- helpless sinners. Doesn't leave a lot of room or incentive for making the world better. (The Dictators of the Proletariat were just as moralistic. When peasants disappointed them by not preferring not to work to death on land that wasn't theirs, the commissars vowed to birth the New Socialist Man, because the current version didn't measure up. Perhaps they felt women were not worth the effort to reengineer.)

I have seen prayer vigils where the pious beg God to convince polluters to give up their profits, and racist politicians to stop pandering to racist voters-- as if "Shame on you!" has ever convinced people ashamed only to leave that last little penny in the old woman's purse. It's true, in the history of the world God does on occasion move gangsters to choose a better path. Prince Siddhartha gave up his wealth to wander the forest naked, meditating. The Emperor Charles, after laying waste to half of Europe, quit his job and joined a monkastery. In a change of heart, Hitler dedicated his twilight years to building shrines to the millions he'd murdered, and a big-time real estate wheeler-dealer promised to donate his fortune --ten billion dollars, he said-- to labor unions, women's shelters and immigrant rights groups.

Likewise, I've seen community elders exhorting kids to Boy Scout virtues, and assuring girls they are little princesses, in neighborhoods besieged by unemployment, addiction, lack of education, toxic waste, and the tender care of the National Rifle Association; seems incommensurate with the problems. It's as if shouting "Eat right!" at people with little money, education, or access to health care and cheap vegetables could possibly stem rising rates of obesity. Children are supposed to learn self-esteem from wearing uniforms and reciting rhymed slogans and lists of rules, offering curtsies and flowers to the photos of dead people they have been taught to regard as saints-- really, more like plastic dashboard saints, talismans against terrors only dimly understood. Sometimes the exhortations come coupled with classes to teach life skills such as budgeting, child care and organized advocacy; at least then they have a chance of making a difference. Sometimes the self-righteous tone drives away folks who need help the most.

Not surprisingly, often we end up disappointed with our neighbors and with the paltry results of our efforts. We achieve Prohibition and the drug wars, abstinence-only sex education, rape victims too ashamed to complain, the Crusade against a billion Muslims, Guns Don't Kill People, moments of silence for schoolkids murdered by the NRA, prayers for the sick, mass deportations of "illegals", the opioid epidemic, jobless job training and the other accomplishments of our Moral Majority.

One of my students, age 17, was afraid she was pregnant. Abortion was out of the question, she announced, because if you spread your legs you must take the consequences. Great environment to bring a newborn into: as lifelong punishment for mom's teenage depravity.

**** Pass the buck: that's not my job.**

> . . . I must have had the feeling that it was no affair of mine when I heard the people around me declaring an open season on Jews, Freemason, and Social Democrats, or Jehovah's Witnesses. I thought I was not implicated if I myself did not take part.
>
> The ordinary party member was being taught that grand policy was much too complex for him to judge it. Consequently, one felt one was being represented, never called upon to take personal responsibility. The whole structure of the system was aimed at preventing conflicts of conscience from even arising. . . . Worse still was the restriction of responsibility to one's own field. Everyone kept to his own group— of architects, physicians, jurists, technicians, soldiers, or famers. The professional organizations to which everyone had to belong were called chambers (Physicians' Chamber, Art Chamber), and this term aptly described the way people were

> immured in isolated, closed-off areas of life. (Albert Speer, Hitler's Armaments Minister, p.65)

A common way to compartmentalize is to lay on others the responsbility for the political choices we make, as if we have no choice at all. Again, our lives are a lot saner when we focus on the things we can control; but sometimes we draw the lines so narrowly and so conveniently that irresponsibility becomes complicity.

Just following orders was the excuse Nazis used for taking part in mass murders. What could I do? they asked, and did not listen for an answer. My responsibility is be a good soldier; it's up to the higher-ups to make the big decisions. The Milgram experiments showed there is nothing particularly German about the Good German; under the right circumstances many, many of us will follow even the most criminal orders. Anyone who doubts that this happens outside the lab need only recall Bush II's torture program, in which a government lawyer, following orders, wrote up a legal justification for torture, which gave cover to scores of CIA staff and contractors to torture people suspected of ties to terrorism, or of speaking Arabic. At Nuremberg the Allies condemned the just-following-orders fellows, and hanged them. That was a long time ago.

As with the terrorist War on Terror, many times the boss' authority derives from the great cause which justifies any crime.

- Jesus made me do it-- the favorite of jihadists of every religion. They are especially fond of murdering women and gay people in God's name, but really any infidel --anyone who disagrees-- is suitable prey for these righteous warriors.
- Adam Smith made me do it. Every time a corporado closes a factory, poisons a river, kills employees, triples the price of life-saving drugs, sells your personal information, scams investors, sends soldiers to battle with defective weapons, evades taxes, steals trillions of dollars from taxpayers, or buys politicians, he cites the free market as the culprit. Also unicorns.
- Karl Marx made me do it. With history on your side, Utopia just around the corner and the workers of the world awaiting rescue, what lies and murders cannot be justified? When I first got into politics, I remember being very aware how quickly my usual shyness and hesitancy retreated when I had something big to say.
- The children made me do it. There's nothing I won't do to protect the little ones, or fetuses, White Womenhood, Western Civilization, or that perennial favorite, PPPP-FMRW-- Protect our Precious Pink Penises from the Monstruous Regiment of Women. I remember a few years back, the trailer for the unreality show The Contender had one of the fighters saying, "My kids are the inspiration behind my boxing" (4-2-05).

Writing about campaigns to protect rainforests and the people who live there, Tsing notes,

> With the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, with its sense of the failure of aggressive patriotism, both conservatives and progressives began to portray the protection of innocents as the remaining justifiable rationale for political action. In this climate, 'protective' causes proliferated, with a diverse array of activists and bureaucrats working to save whales, battered women, abused children, rainforests, and medical students in Grenada, as well as fetuses. These are not politically homogeneous

> causes. (I support some and not others.) I group them only to point out the rhetoric of protecting fragile and dependent victims, with which advocates of each tried to make their cause attractive to the public. . . . Rainforest dwellers, to the extent that they are worth supporting, become guileless primitives. . . . Yet, reading Uma Adang's poem alone is enough to warn against political models that turn marginal peoples into needy dependents.

● Unity is a good one, too. While sometimes the demand is just tactical --Let's postpone hashing out our differences until after we win this campaign-- most often it means, We (that is, I, your fearless leader) can't afford dissension in the ranks. For the sake of the Moomint, we can't let our enemies see us question ourselves. Ever. Shut up or get out.

There are plenty more grand justifications; perhaps you have your own favorites. The excuses may sound different, but the mechanism is the same: I am at once personally responsible to act, and at the same time accountable to no one. Some distressed observers urge us to attend to the details of whichever ideology is being spouted, as if the ideas themselves mattered. They do not. They are permissions for the crimes we want to commit for other reasons.

Religions in particular have had a long time to try out many variations of this formula. It's a curious kind of empowerment. On the one hand, we are helpless, no more than sinners in the hands of an angry God, as Jonathan Edwards had it. On the other, with God's help, we can do anything. "God alone was in control and Calvin absolutely powerless, yet he felt singled out for a special mission precisely by his acute sense of his own failure and impotence" (Armstrong 281). Many people have felt they've been tasked by God. Once we submit, once we put aside our own will to become His instruments, then we tap into His infinite power. At Lake Pointe megachurch in Texas, the community services director

> prays, 'Oh, Lord, I love you so much. Thank you for what you've done for me. Use me in a mighty way and to your glory not mine. May my mouth be yours. May my ears be yours, my arms be yours. Tell me how to use the atoms in my body for your glory.' Christians are nothing but God in skin, he likes to say" (Wicker p.6).

One of his responsibilities is to decide who to help, among the people in need who come to his church.

> Petitioners sit on hard-back chairs around a little table as they plead their need. First thing Van likes to say is: 'If you get anything out of this, it's coming from God. If it's bad, I apologize. It came from me. It slipped through.'
>
> Van never goes home worrying that he made the wrong decision that day. It's in God's hands. . . .
>
> "So even in my sin when I am sitting here, and something comes though and it comes from me and not from God, I am still fully righteous. So I can put my head on my pillow tonight. I don't have to feel bad or guilty, because God has made me fully righteous. That's what the Bible tells me. . . . When you're fully loved, fully forgiven, fully whole, even with Jesus, your esteem is in Christ. You're perfect" (pp.7-8)

I've heard echoes of this sentiment when believers are praised for their good work. Not my doing, but God's, they reply. You'd think people being complimented would be a little more

generous about sharing the credit with all the people they work with, and sharing practical information about their success. "Pray!" seems a little miserly to admirers looking to help. On the other hand, giving credit to the Almighty does make our work seem miraculous.

So I can see the attraction of being a vessel for the divine. In some places, it allows us to do things otherwise forbidden.

> . . . spirit possession in many societies represents a quasi-covert form of social protest for women and for marginal, oppressed groups of men for whom any open protest would be exceptionally dangerous. . . . In the case of spirit possession, a woman seized by a spirit can openly make known her grievances against her husband and male relatives, curse them, make demands, and, in general, violate the powerful norms of male dominance. She may, while possessed, cease work, be given gifts, and generally be treated indulgently. Because it is not she who is acting, but rather the spirit that has seized her, she cannot be held personally responsible for her words" (Scott 1990 p.140).

Paul wrote, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Galatians 5:18). In medieval times, the Brethren of the Free Spirit drew the logical conclusion that, once united with God, we can do no wrong (Cohn 148ff). Thus any kind of vice is permissible because it's no more than God's will, God acting through us. We don't have good records about the harm caused, if any, by their sexual license. We have plenty of data about holy war, and collect more every generation.

Of course, if we mess up, or if we get caught, or if things don't work out, it's not nice to blame the Almighty for our mistakes. God's loving support should allow us to achieve great things. When we fall short, isn't that kind of an insult to God? Ehrenreich writes about Christian job training and job search services:

> To [career counselor Patrick] Knowles and authors like Mike Hernacki, you alone are responsible for your fate. To the Christians in the job-search business, it is God who takes the responsibility. Hernacki recognizes this conflict: 'In the past, when I've expressed this message, some people have reacted angrily and said that this somehow denies the existence of God as the Source.' But he nimbly resolves this by observing, 'If you believe God is the Source, and the Source is on your side, working through you, you don't have an excuse to plead helplessness again.' In other words, prayer gives the believer access to the same kind of infinite power Hernacki exercises through his thoughts.

This moralist model rightly reminds us of our individual responsibility. Nearly all of us have some measure of personal choice, even if it's only to jump off a bridge. But we tend to fail when we ignore or misunderstand the institutional, cultural and group-behavior forces at play. The put-yourself-in-God's-hands school of sociology is convenient for those who are doing very well under current policy and institutions, and like to think it's God's will.

Roles as refuge. Social roles are another way to limit our responsibility. They help us live and work together, because we need to know what to expect from one another. And we depend on

folks assuming the responsibilies that their roles entail-- that, for instance, parents will put aside fear and vanity to do what's best for their kids; that doctors will treat people regardless of whether the doctor likes them personally; that scientists will publish results honestly, even if they refute the scientists' preferred outcome; that public school teachers will treat all students fairly and won't use their authority to promote religious beliefs in the classroom; that police and judges will stick to the law regardless of their feelings about the accused; that generals will obey elected civilian leadership.

At the same time, just as social roles define what is expected of us, they also limit our responsibility. Factory workers may not give it a second thought when told to dump toxic chemicals into the river, or make bombs for the Saudis. A prosecutor may know the opposing lawyer is missing a key argument for the defense, but feels it's not her job to point that out. Let the adversarial system play out; the lawyers' only responsibility is to the process, not to the outcome; not to justice. Eulogies for fallen soldiers mention their long service, but do not distinguish between combat against terrorists or on behalf of terrorists (as when Green Berets helped death squads in Central America in the 1980s). In all these situations it's someone else's job to do the right thing. But what if raising kids, fighting racism, or protecting the planet are jobs too big to leave to someone else?

Evidently uniforms are a particularly effective way to signal how we should act.

> . . . women who were dressed in Ku Klux Klan-like white disguises delivered twice as much (apparent) electric shock to another woman as did women who were not only undisguised but also wore large name tags. . . . In a second study, when the women were wearing nurses' uniforms, they gave *less* shock than women in regular dress . . . . Apparently the KKK disguise was a signal to behave aggressively; the nurses' uniforms were a signal to behave nurturantly (Wade, Tavris p.670).

Other experiments assign volunteers the role of prison guards; many quickly turn abusive (Wade, Tavris 643-5). You may remember, the U.S. military conducted its own large scale experiment, this time with real soldiers and prisoners, at Abu Ghraib in Iraq.

At the excreting end of the chain of command it's not evading responsibility but assuming it that justifies heroic measures and crimes. Consider Heinlein's caring, brilliant, decisive Chief Engineer with the common touch. He runs a continent-spanning transport system somewhat greater, uglier and more destructive than a combination of the U.S. highway system and the nuclear power industry. He must defeat an envious union boss and thereby save civilization. His vast responsibility gives him the perfect excuse to mobilize a paramilitary army, ignore hundreds of casualties, and hang up on governors, cabinet ministers, the president, and his own wife ("The Roads Must Roll", 1940). It's the perfect, sentimental expression of techno-fascism, prefiguring by two years Hitler's war manager Albert Speer, and a hundred incarnations since.

In recent years we've seen some real-life examples of white men taking responsibility. Former FBI Director James Comey, for one, decided that revealing a new investigation into candidate Hillary Clinton on the eve of the 2016 election was the only responsible thing to do (while somehow forgetting to mention the concurrent investigation into candidate D.J. Trump). We see also the long file of distinguished diplomats, spies and generals who served President Trump for a

season; their friends and family have let it be known these men are patriots, trying to protect the country from its president; now the heroes can't sit without a ring pillow.

That other guy will take care of it. The technocultists say, Not to worry! We don't have to change business as usual, because future generations will invent tech to clean up the air and oceans, protect the power grid from cyberwar, cure pollution-caused cancer, air condition the planet, and turn nuclear waste into vanilla pudding. To me, this behavior is very much akin to the folks who thinking buying a treadmill frees them to pig out on soft drinks and freedom fries.

A man's gotta do. . . .

> "I myself cut off my brother's hand," said Aliou Touré, a police chief in the Islamist-held north of [Mali]. "We had no choice but to practice the justice of God" (Nossiter).

So often we frame our choices as having no choice. We lean on this formula because it reassures us that we did the right thing no matter the outcome. Speer explained his decision to join the Nazi Party this way: "The crucial fact appeared to me to be that I personally had to choose between a future Communist Germany or a future National Socialist Germany since the political center between these antipodes had melted away." (p.48).

Right-- Stalin and Hitler are the only alternatives. (Some of the sticks-and-bricks boys who fight neoNazis on TV today employ similar arguments.) For decades anti-abortion voters have supported candidates whose positions on race, jobs, health care, and the environment they claim to loathe, on the grounds that the chance to save millions of fetuses Trumps all other issues. The no-choice posture reassures us that, even if we fail, even if a lot of people suffer as a result, it's not our fault. We did everything we could. But sometimes that's not true.

Many democratically-minded people also explain their position this way. It can be dangerous to stand up against the big institutions and the people who run them, and we acknowledge the risk by saying, I had no choice. I'm not sure that helps us reach out to neighbors who feel they do have a choice, who could stand with us or duck for cover. Why should they help? I think there are no guarantees, but that we can win sometimes, and make our lives better, and that our neighbors will join in for that-- if we make space for them to express the reasons.

**** Cast blame.**
Scapegoat the most vulnerable.

We got problems, big problems. But it's risky to challenge the people who cause them. They're too powerful. So many of us direct our wrath instead at the people least able to fight back-- low income people, people of color, GLBTQ people; people without lawyers, money or friends in hah places. Some men blame women for their own desire, while some women blame other women for their own disappointments. Nazis and eugenicists liked to pick on people with disabilities, or alleged disabilities. White people getting government assistance blame black women and Big Gummint.

Attacking people who can't retaliate makes us feel better. "So what do we do? We find scapegoats. Aggressing against those smaller or less powerful than ourselves relieves our physical discomfort. In fact, some people become quite *addicted* to this rush of relief. They're called bullies, tyrants, muggers, rapists, child abusers, wife beaters, and sexual predators" (Cummins p.110). We can't get that rush by attacking people who can fight back-- who can fire us, or jail us, or take away the kids. Bullies may be angry, but we are not stupid.

Now some might contend, the Right does challenge the mighty. But it's not true. Their boogeymen are mythical or so vague as to be meaningless-- the Deep State, the New World Order, the global network of pedophiles. When they do name names they take care to choose enemies who have no power whatsoever over, much less interest in them-- Obama, Hillary, George Soros. They glide over the putrid mastodons in the room-- Moscow Mitch and the poor persecuted President who despite running the country for years have nothing to do with its crises. Do they fight racist sheriffs or the local polluter? Hell, no, they work for them.

Once in awhile rightists do attack an immediately powerful person like Zuckerberg-- more for his supposed opposition to President Trump (in fact he is one of the President's greatest props, as the President is Zuckerberg's), than for the globe-girdling surveillance and disinformation apparatus he has built. And they attack on cue the low-level GOP flunkies the President has targeted for not committing crimes fast enough. The Right's favorite enemies help them mimic democratic protest while avoiding any real, risky challenges to the powerful.

Scapegoating is a way to swear loyalty to our bosses, divert their attentions to some other target, and earn big commissions (see Border Patrol, above). In addition to their pain-displacing properties, scapegoating attacks are a great way to divide and isolate the true targets, advocates for democracy and justice. Jeffrey Victor puts it this way: "The internal enemy can be a useful proxy target, a stand-in, for attacks between powerful conflicting elements in a society. Conflicting groups can direct their attacks safely against the proxy target, without having to engage each other directly. Normally, a society does not choose genuinely powerful internal enemies to function as scapegoat targets" (pp.198-9).

Two thousand years ago, Roman conquerors tortured and executed the heterodox preacher Jesus. Writing decades later, while or just after the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, Mark made excuses for the Romans and put the whole blame for Jesus' murder on other Jews. One may infer he didn't want to end up like Jesus. Mark's spin has justified the murder of millions of Jews from that time to this.

There can be big material benefits to stomping the out-group. In Rwanda, mass murderers took over their victims' land, which was likewise the purpose of terror campaigns against black people in the American South and against Mexicans in Texas. In Germany, the Nazi big shots amassed gold teeth, bank accounts and great artworks, while humble tradesmen scarfed up Jewish businesses.

Blame the victim.

Most of all, I think, blaming the victim is a way to reassure ourselves that we are not like those other people, that terrible things cannot happen to us. I mentioned above the Just World hypothesis, the idea that if we are good people and follow the rules, the world will reward us. The logical corollary is that people who get hurt must have brought it on themselves. Sloan elaborates:

> In the 1960s, psychologist Melvin Lerner began investigating what he referred to as the belief in a just world. According to this belief, people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. . . .
>
> This belief provides a kind of self-protection: if the world is governed by a principle of justice, then each of us should be protected from misfortune because we generally believe that we are good people. Justice demands that good people receive good treatment. But this self-protective view may cause problems when we confront others who appear to be virtuous or innocent but nevertheless are the victims of some misfortune. How, in a world of justice, can we account for apparently innocent victimization?
>
> The just world hypothesis suggests several strategies to maintain this belief. When confronted with such a situation, our first attempt is to rectify the injustice. In almost all cases, however, we can't do this. We can't make a patient with cancer not have the disease. When we can't rectify the injustice, we attempt to identify something that the person did to bring on the misfortune. . . .
>
> This kind of cognitive rearrangement is self-protective. After all, if an apparently innocent person is nonetheless afflicted with a serious illness, how can we be certain that the same fate won't befall us? It can't, of course, if we believe that the world is a just place and we are good people (pp 184-6).

Here we're discussing not illness but crimes. Hegi describes the same dynamic among non-Nazi Germans in World War II:

> Since laws no longer afforded protection, they'd learned to look out for their own survival. And part of surviving was to remind themselves of the differences between themselves and those who had been taken away.
>
> At least they were not Jewish.
>
> At least they'd never said anything against the Führer— not openly, that is (p.278).

Kilbourne notes that

> Women are especially cruel judges of other women's sexual behavior, mostly because we are so desperate to believe we are in control of what happens to us. It is too frightening to face the fact that male violence against women is irrational and commonplace. It is reassuring to believe that we can avoid it by being good girls, avoiding dark places, staying out of bars, dressing 'innocently' (p.275).

Prosperity gospel and extra-Christian spirituality alike promote the belief that belief will bring us good health, big cars and compliant sex partners, and that there is surely something weak or wrong about people who experience anything less than happiness.

We could trade examples from many times and places. And I have to say, this was exactly my reaction when I heard environmental activists talk about the times they'd been threatened, beaten, bombed or shot at. They must have done something stupid, I thought. I wanted to believe they got hurt through some carelessness or miscalculation, some arrogance or naivete, when all it was was bravery.

I see yet another aspect of this blame-the-victim mindset, a sort of competitive victimhood: the Irish, the Christians, the pioneers, the soldiers, the "job creators" . . . we had it bad, too, or our ancestors did. No one helped us (which may or may not be true). We survived by faith, courage and hard work, not by wallowing in pity. So what are you complaining about?

We cherish our grievances. "John Shelton Reed, a (white Southern) sociologist, describes the condition of a white Southerner as a perpetual sense of being unfairly treated and looked down on" (*Economist* 7-1-17). Likewise, many Christians frequently refer to the persecution Christians suffered 1700 years ago, before Christianity became the religion of empire. They take as persecution current challenges to Christianity's role as the state religion of our new empire.

If we can recount our own stories of persecution, however remote, we might for a moment divert attention from our responsibility to fight even worse injustice. Fritzsche writes that, under intense bombing during World War II, many Germans got the sense that "Germany was being punished in some sort of divine reckoning, for persecuting the Jews. With this idea of retaliation, public opinion established a link between what had happened to the Jews and what was happening to the Germans. But if popular reactions to the air raids revealed guilty knowledge about the treatment of the Jews, the association between persecution and bombing also enabled Germans to relieve themselves of guilt, since they had become victims, too." Metzgar cautions us about blaming each other for the inevitable mistakes we make as imperfect people, (p.131). But slavery, rape, conquest, mass deportation and mass murder are not mistakes.

Even folks not particularly racist may still cast a jealous eye on any suggestion that because of past suffering some people now deserve more. Again, I think of the working class white folks in my GED class who were not merely skeptical but actually distressed to read about discrimination against people of color. In large part this expresses the zero-sum mindset: any help to others comes at my expense. I'll lose my place in line. And for those next to last in line, the prospect of losing even that sweat-slick toehold is a serious threat. Even a statement as indisputable as Black Lives Matter is taken as an assault on white people. Evidently many of us lack any sense that helping others helps us, too.

Competitive victimhood can also reflect the need to distance ourselves from the horrors we hear-- in this case not so much whistling past the graveyard, because we ourselves might fall into the fresh-dug depository, but rather as a way to avoid taking responsibility. It hurts to hear about injustice without being able to do anything about it. If we can say, Things are bad all over, it's a way to trivialize the issue at hand and deny the need for any response. One day at the social services agency we were talking about crime and punishment. One counselor compared prison to crowded conditions aboard navy ships, claiming that inmates are much better off-- they get "three squares a day", for free. Another staffer chimed in, Yeah, and if you go to the brig, you get bread and water, while in prison they give you steak.

Competitive victimization is more a way to deny help to others than to claim it for ourselves, because we, of course, make our way in the world without any help or special privilege. Though sometimes we claim we are powerless to fix problems or challenge the bosses, we resent it when outsiders treat us as helpless victims desperate to be rescued, or suggest that we let others take advantage of us. Even folks who have been badly abused don't like to think of themselves as having no choice. For instance,

> Although in the collective it is patently true that women are "victims" of sexist social policy, individual women reject the victim label and, consequently, those who tag them with it. . . . every time we talk to women as if they were victims, they tune us out. "That's somebody else." No matter how bad life really is, "It ain't me." How many times have we heard the testimony where well-meaning [feminists] have gotten up and said, "This is a program for poor women, and we want to take care of them"? (Henry 276-7)

Some victims we don't resent. They are safer if they are helpless and/or far away. So sometimes it's easier to collect money or promote policy that will help starving Africans or Salvadorean peasants than to help our next-door neighbors. We can limit our exposure, as the risk management people say. Metzgar says that we middle class people are a lot more sympathetic to abused workers than to powerful union members.

It's a small and evidently irresistible step to go from blaming victims for their own oppression, to blaming them for ours. The miracle of political correctness transforms persecuted and exploited groups into privileged oppressors. Demanding equality, women and people of color snatch jobs, education and political leadership from white men. Infidels persecute Christians by resisting persecution. Here's a good one: Vermont's candidate for governor has an unfair advantage because it's unfair to attack her for being a transgender person-- which Fakes News then proceeds to do (https://www.salon.com/2018/08/16/fox-news-host-tucker-carlson-presides-over-hateful-attack-on-trans-politician-christine-hallquist/).

Blame challengers.

Possibly we reserve our most intense reactions for folks who stick their necks out at some risk-- black people who respond to racist bosses, women who name abusive men, gay people who won't hide, moms who blow the whistle on corporate polluters, many others. Those of us with the most privilege like to believe --must believe-- that all's well with the world, that everyone who works hard can enjoy the good things in life, that our own prosperity is built on something fundamental about the way the world works, not on the suffering of others. Even if we are not directly and actively involved in robbery, we don't want to hear that it's built into the system that has made our lives so comfortable.

Sure, some may suffer misfortune. There may be a little unfairness here and there at the margins, perpetrated by those ignorant rednecks, doncha know. But that's rare, exceptional. The system works for most people most of the time. Look how much better off we are than our grandparents! We got Walmart and Amazon and . . . well, lots of stuff. We can watch porn or football on our phones! And it's getting better alla time. Anyone says different, they're one a these professional whiners, always looking for attention, got nothing better to do than complain. Why don't they channel all that energy into getting a job? Look at the bright side, like I always do.

We don't have to be rich, though, to resent the challengers. Those who know from their own experience exactly what dissenters are talking about --the disrespect, discrimination and violence-- may be especially disturbed to see this dirty laundry aired in public. We don't want attention

drawn to our humiliations. Even more distressing, the fact that some folks dare to speak up and fight back call into question our own choice to settle for subordination. As mentioned above, when we feel helpless to change our circumstances for the better, it's tempting to adopt the story that we have chosen our life the way it is. We become invested in the status quo, no matter how corrupt, and we come to resent the people who question it. Because in doing so they don't merely challenge the powers that be, they challenge our own decision to accept injustice. Henry has a long discussion of this dynamic with respect to rightist women, but of course many many of us are in this position.

> These daily transgressions are as common as crabgrass and as hard to eradicate. How do you report them? Prove them? Where do you go for help? When you get rid of one noxious behavior, another crops up behind it. Better to tolerate things as they are, the accepting majority is saying, than stir up trouble without end. Or, better yet, to negotiate quietly and hope to ameliorate the situation to some degree.
>
> Keeping quiet is the much safer way. One can back down, but that requires justifying that action to oneself. Far easier (and less costly, personally) is criticizing, or even despising, those who do not back down, who do speak up (p.400).

Where I live, when there's a political fight, often we see a tension among folks ready to take to the streets and others more comfortable with a lot of prep work-- collecting data, crafting the message and lining up allies. I think it's totally legitimate and necessary to push each other on strategies and tactics. What's most effective in these circumstances? What will best protect the folks on the front lines? What will strengthen the base for democratic power? More specifically, how do our words and actions make sense to and help win over the people we want to march with us?

The truth is we need to employ all the tools available, and then we need to invent new ones. Meantime we can learn to control our fear and defensiveness when some among us call for bold action. "While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities 'unwise and untimely,'" King wrote to white preachers.

> We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant 'Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."
>
> We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. . . . Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dart of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen

> curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness" then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. . . .

It's worth noting that, at the same time King was defending oppressed people's right to take action now, the letter itself demonstrates his commitment to keep reaching out to folks who are not on the front lines but can help, once they figure out which side they're on.

**** Visualize whirled peas! Wishful thinking.**

> Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."
>
> "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."
>
> --Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

And it does take practice-- years of training in fact, for us to learn to accept nonsense. But we have plenty of institutions engaged in just this endeavor, hobbling our minds from childhood. You may have read how rich guys in China used to crush the feet of little girls and bind them up in infancy. These enslaved women grew up crippled so their owners could get some kind of erotic charge out of their deformities. Today our masters spend billions to crush and bind our brains.

If sometimes we prize intention over results, wishful thinking is the expectation that intent itself brings fulfillment, with action almost incidental or only magically related to results. Sounds silly but sometimes we do act this way, especially when we don't know how to get what we need-- especially when we have been trained to believe lies about how the world works. After many failures we just give up on making sense of the world. We attribute others' success to their daring, their willful disregard for the limits that seem to confine the rest of us so closely. We ask, Why not me? Anything is possible-- *must* be possible. Visualize the job promotion or that new toaster-oven. Meditate to cure world hunger. Enroll in Trump U. and you too will make billions in real estate. Keep sending gift cards to that handsome war hero you met online, soon's they let him out of the hospital he'll race to your side with a ring. Send ten bucks to the TV evangelist and God will send you back a thousand. God wants you to be rich! (As so compellingly demonstrated by Jesus' resort and casino empire along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.)

How about this miracle of cosmic benevolence?: Powerful people who are not your momma will love and care for you as if they were. Wishful thinking is both a cause and a result of our need to believe that we belong to a special group of people, superior to all the others. We are thereby more vulnerable to what the criminologists call affinity fraud, as practiced by Bernie Madoff and many politicians: Trust me! Once I was one of you, until I discovered how to loose the bonds of space and time. I was just like you, and when I tell you the secret you can be like me. Surrender to me your dignity, your independence, and your life savings and I will elevate you from your tiny drab loser life to my own exalted status. I will make you great.

Certainly focussing on our goals can help us plan and carry out the steps we need to get there. Wildavsky is right, too, in observing that we'd never even start if we knew all the difficulties ahead of time. But the devotees of Visualize! talk as if we can skip that part about analysis and skills and strategy derived from study of the world beyond our belly-buttons. I remember a kid in GED class. He didn't need to learn this algebra stuff because he was going to get rich on the stock market. You know-- people would happily sell to him at a low price and buy from him at a high price, and he'd become a player in no time a tall. As for the math, he'd hire someone to do all that. Well, he was inexperienced, and no sillier than I at a comparable stage. But I know grown men and women who hold similar ideas about how the world works.

Sometimes we take refuge in magical thinking because the reality is simply too frightening. If we truly accepted what the research says about cyberwar or climate change, it would upend our lives. We would have to make sacrifices for which we are in no way prepared. Certainly the politicians are not. Best to keep our fingers crossed and pretend we don't see the Ebola in the room, because the alternatives are just too hard to face.

I spent a couple mornings at a local school, where outreach workers helped immigrants plan what they'd do if ICE hauled them away. Who would take care of their homes and kids? Not many people came. Perhaps they thought that making lists and sharing phone numbers just did not match the enormity of the prospect of losing their jobs, homes and children.

The genii of transnational capitalism have their own versions of Visualize. Remember the great internet stocks bubble of 2001? Investment gurus promised to repeal the laws of gravity: with the "new economy" stock prices could only climb. Lots of investors bought into companies because they put up cool web sites, while losing millions of dollars every day. Then the wizards of Wall

Street bestowed upon us the even more catastrophic housing bubble of 2006-7, when the big banks generated huge volumes of junk mortgage securities, carefully repackaged to deceive investors--and then overdosed on their own product.

As a former schoolteacher, I am personally more familiar with the Bill Gates - Eli Broad Hogwarts School of Education. Its core strategy: terrorize students, teachers and administrators through high-stakes testing; smarter students are bound to ensue. O, sure, every year the billionaires publish new lists of breakthrough teaching practices, but none of the practices themselves are new-- mostly old piss in new digitized bottles. The active toadsblood and moonbeam is to frighten children and teachers into success by threatening to close their schools--one more Mystic Market Moment having nothing to do with free markets, or common sense. Perhaps billionaires find that threatening their nannies, drivers, gardeners and spouses makes them work harder for less pay, but it may not be the best motivation for little kids trying to learn to read.

There was a flick several years ago called Mosquito Coast. Harrison Ford is a down-home Yankee tinkerer, full of brilliant ideas and inventions. He buys land in Central America and undertakes to build Utopia. But he doesn't understand people, least of all his own family, and the enterprise comes to a bad end.

His disciples walk among us still: the Church of the Technical Fix. These folks believe (at any rate, sell the belief) that there is no political problem very expensive technology cannot solve. Fracking and nuclear power eliminate the need to conserve energy. Radioactive waste? We'll just load it onto rockets and shoot it into the sun. Flooding farmland with fertilizers and pesticides will guarantee increased food production forever, while new cancer therapies will outrace the damage factory chemicals do to our bodies. Gigantic floodgates built into the seabed will save coastal cities from rising seas.

Online shopping will empower and enrich millions of microentrepreneurs while giving new life and meaning to our communities (see Slee on the Sharing Economy). Computer classes will retrain laid-off 50-year-olds for the Jobs of the Future. Robots will liberate us from work without liberating us from employment. Their very ignorance of humanity will make artificial intelligences the perfect impartial policymakers. Millions of drones and surveillance cameras will make us safer. And social media will bring democracy to China and the Mideast.

At the same time, we like to attribute to others the intentions most congenial to ourselves, regardless of the evidence. Vote for the guy who swears up and down he'll destroy health care and food assistance, because we know he doesn't really mean it. Vote for the guy with the secret plan to defeat terrorism, although he can't reveal it, because it's secret.

Vying with the U.S. for most fictional political process must be Britain's frantic flight from Europe. The Brexiteers will raise anchor and sail their islands across the ocean, where President Trump will generously grant their plea for asylum; they will take their place next to Guam and Puerto Rico as U.S. colonies. It's one thing to choose a hard path knowingly, to take risks for the sake of future benefits, or to forego material benefits in order to build a freer, more just, more sustainable society. But evidently a lot of the Brexiteers imagined they could drive away their darker neighbors and shed all those pesky rules and agreements without affecting the trade and financial sectors that hold up their economy. They distrusted technocrats' warnings about how much damage the break would cause, perhaps figuring only the elites would suffer, but eagerly

grasped politicians' flimsy promises that they could have their sausage and eat it, too. Once the Brits stood alone, defying the mighty Nazi war machine. Today their grandchildren embrace isolation, fleeing screaming from barefoot refugees.

Rightists like to sneer at the masses coddled by food assistance and social security. What about ideologues so insulated from reality, so used to living off the infrastructure built over generations without acknowledging it, or putting anything back --stripmining their own economy-- that they figure they can piss away all these resources without a care because some big daddy will always take care of them?

It's the ongoing wet dream: actions have no consequences. This fantasy of unfettered freedom has been part of the American religion since Jamestown: the lingering sense that we have a whole world to do with what we please, and plenty of room to bury our mistakes. Thus we can invade other countries and the people there will only applaud. Boost consumption every year without risking the environment or health or the bonds of community. Give every kid and adult addictive interactive devices and that will not affect our minds and relationships. Soak livestock and kitchen wipes with precious antibiotics without breeding superbugs. Incite people at campaign rallies to beat up protesters and the violence will be directed only at our enemies.

Many of us are attracted to people who act this way. We, too, would like to be Masters of the Universe --intransigent rebels, shameless market manipulators, sulky superheroes, ninja assassins who have entirely shed any scruples and regrets. South of the border there's a whole musical genre devoted to the heroic deeds of narcotraficante mass murderers, while musicians here pose as gangstas for adoring fans.

Lots of people admire President Trump because for so long he seemed able to boast and threaten and lie, assault women, steal from business partners, humiliate subordinates again and again, and bully other politicians without consequence. What I see as weak, impulsive and defensive behavior, half of us describe as "strong", because the President seems never to ask anyone's advice, or consider how others might respond -- a two-year-old's expectation of omnipotence and immediate gratification. It may be too that President Trump's entirely transactional approach to policy (that is, when he isn't whining), e.g. the threats to abandon long-time NATO allies if they don't pay up, also appeals to this fantasy of dominance. We'd love to be always in the superior position, needing no one else's help or permission, my way or the highway, and able to walk at any time. And for the folks who grew up ashamed to admit their selfishness, President Trump's is so refreshing. He gives me permission to admit not only that yes, I am the most important person in my life, he shows me that others only have value for what they can do for me. For those of us distressed by the hazards and uncertainties of caring for others, he relieves us of the burden of considering anyone else at all, unless, like Elon Musk, they can pay up. President Trump saves us, redeems us, frees us from all these messy feelings of friendship or empathy.

We do-gooders indulge our own little fantasies, not always in the privacy of our homes. We pray that polluters and speculators will realize the error of their ways, and from the goodness of their hearts give up the crimes that pay for their palaces. Black Lives Matter activists demand that Hillary Clinton fall to her knees and beg forgiveness for impure thoughts, as if we can overturn the power structure the same way TV writers script weepy farewells for unreality show losers. A defeated candidate tours Texas for months, pouring out his feelings on social media, and details of

his visit to the dentist. A newly minted Congresswoman, criticized for cussing out the President, retorts that she is just being true to herself, full of "sass and attitude", and no one expects her to change her ways just because now she has been hired to represent the people of this nation (Stracqualursi 1-5-19). Perhaps she's auditioning for a game show, or trying to gin up her Utoob numbers. Maybe her constituents elected her as celebrity entertainment. It has worked so well for the presidency, having someone who sees high office as just another stage for the endless performance of Me.

Sometimes we talk about healing our communities, as if we'll all feel better after a good cry. With every defeat we are told we can achieve democratic outcomes by imitating Karl Rove, the Moral Majority and the Tea Party-- without their racism, sexism, class warfare and billions of dollars. Out on the streets, we see TV cameras pointed our way, and imagine that we shake powers and principalities, when all we're doing is contributing our mite to the daily dose of indignation that feeds the online trolls. We huddle in circles, waving earnest signs at each other, while the rest of the world passes by without a glance.

Logically, the faith in Wish and ye shall receive runs counter to the idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds, that we must accept the status quo because nothing else is possible; that, for instance, we ought to trust "pragmatic" politicians and mock the visionaries. But in practice **wishful thinking and aversion to systemic change are allied behaviors.** The folks who think personal success is a function of desire have little interest or confidence in the hard work of rebuilding systems and institutions.

I reckon everyone has fantasies. They are the substance of pornography, the first step of discovery and the media of great art. They can inspire us, or bring out the worst. But when we don't distinguish current reality from our druthers, or do the work of figuring out how to get from here to there, or even stop to think what the world would be like if our fondest dreams came true, then how can we move ahead?

More likely we will fall back and fall down. Unrealistic expectations bring shattering disappointments. And without the skills and support to find our path again, we can fall into the worst kind of wishful thinking, placing our trust in would-be saviors who promise to set everything right without cost.

**** Rationalize failure as what we chose all along.**

When we don't have the tools to analyze or fix our problems, or even to recognize them accurately, we tend to make a lot of mistakes. The temptation is to blame everyone but ourselves, to come up with excuses and justifications that have little relation to what is really going on. Or we change our stories and then insist we have stuck to the same one the whole time. Refusing to learn from our mistakes, we end up making our problems worse.

Remember the '03 invasion of Iraq? The first reason was to destroy Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. When it turned out he didn't have any, President Halliburton decided we had invaded to bring democracy to the Middle East. That didn't work out so well either. At last he trotted out the lamest and most common excuse of all for continuing a war: we must send more young people to die so that heroes already fallen will not have died in vain. Only in the boasts about excluding the French and other Euro-wimps from the spoils was there public

acknowledgment of the real purpose of the invasion: to grab Iraq's oil fields for the President from Big Oil.

A favorite way to excuse our failures is to blame someone else. Here's a hint: don't point fingers at the people who run the big institutions. They are too powerful. They could retaliate. Much safer to pick on the people already under attack in our society. Of course, we'll never solve our problems that way, but at least we can push others into the meatgrinder ahead of us.

Christians are in a curious position. White Christian men have dominated all branches of government since the passing of Jefferson's generation, and yet pornography, drugs, gluttony and violence pervade our culture. We are still embroiled in wars launched decades ago as crusades by a president inspired by God. We consume way more than we need while the prosperity gospel has somehow bypassed tens of millions. Rightist Christians are aging out, as fewer young people buy into their racism and sexism. We are farther than ever from the Heavenly City.

Few Christians take responsibility for any of this. Nor do they dare criticize the big corporations --the most destructive force in modern society-- which have been religion's faithful allies since J.D. Rockefeller. O, they do slam Disney for not firing its GLBT staffers. Otherwise, even as they adopt liberation movement tactics, many Christians blame our miseries on affirmative action, feminism and labor unions, because they reward sinful behavior, pervert the social order, and distract us from our heavenly goal.

Christians can also draw on that ancient tradition of persecution, going back 2,000 years, when they really were persecuted. No matter that Constantine's successors made Christianity the imperial religion, and Christians have been running things in the West ever since-- and persecuting dissenters along the way. In their own minds, they are not the majority with their hands on every lever of power, but an embattled minority, exiles in their homeland.

Christianity's central story is the model for rationalizing failure: Jesus' execution was the key part of his eternal plan.

Another way to respond to failure is to blame simple lack of faith. Since all things are possible to those who believe, we can only fail when we don't believe hard enough. This explanation works best when we have no access to other explanations, and when we are highly motivated to cover up our mistakes.

Perhaps the most dramatic examples of faith in the face of reality are the end-of-the-world folks. Norman Cohn's Pursuit of the Millenium describes many episodes in medieval Europe where people endured extreme hardship to bring about the Second Coming. In the German town of Münster, for example, thousands of Anabaptists suffered starvation and slaughter in an effort to establish a communist theocracy.

In the course of the British conquest of what is now South Africa, the desperate Xhosa people were swept by a prophecy that the ancestors would return and a great wind would blow the British into the sea. But to prepare the way, the people would have to destroy their grain stocks and slaughter all their cattle. Many did so, but some resisted. The date first prophesied passed without the resurrection:

> But when the 'moon of wonders and dangers' failed to bring forth the prophecy's promise, anticipation and joy turned into disillusion and anguish. [King] Kreli

> issued orders to suspend the Cattle Killing and sent urgent messages to [the prophet] Mhlakaza.
>
> If the delusion had ended at this point, it would not have been the tragedy it became, for the slaughter was not yet wholesale and large numbers of animals remained. It was a curiosity of the phenomenon that this disappointment actually fueled the prophecy and led to its much greater impact in the months to come.
>
> Mhlakaza and [his niece] Nongquase had an explanation for what came to be known as the First Disappointment of August 16, 1856. The prophecy failed to materialize, they said, because some of the people had sold their cattle rather than slaughtering them (Bulgatz 168).

Kreli resumed the slaughter. Believers started attacking unbelievers and destroyed the remaining cattle. Two more resurrection dates came and went, and 20,000 to 40,000 died of murder and starvation before the movement fell apart.

Festinger et al describe a less gruesome process, the Millerite movement of the 1840s. In 1818 William Miller, a New England farmer, prophesied the end of the world in 1843. Despite opposition by mainstream churches, a lot of people took him seriously, and by 1840 the movement had thousands of adherents, mobilized through camp meetings and religious newspapers and tracts. As 1843 approached, many sold or gave away their belongings in preparation for the Second Coming. The usual succession of dates and disappointments took place. Festinger notes, however, that the disappointments, far from alienating the faithful, actually intensified their enthusiasm.

The two partial disconfirmations (April 23, 1843, and the end of the calendar year 1843) and one complete and unequivocal disconfirmation (March 21, 1844) served simply to strengthen conviction that the Coming was near at hand and to increase the time and energy that Miller's adherents spent trying to convince others:

> Perhaps not so much from the preaching and writing of [Rev. Samuel] Snow, as from a deep conviction that the end of all things could not be far away, some of the believers in Northern New Hampshire, even before the summer began, failed to plow their fields because the Lord would surely come "before another winter." (Festinger 19).

Devotees demanded another date: "It is interesting that it was the insistence of the ordinary members of the Millerite movement that the October date be accepted. The leaders of the movement resisted and counseled against it for a long time but to no avail" (20). It was the failure of the world to end on October 22, 1844 that finally broke the movement, although some of these believers went on to become Seventh Day Adventists, a highly successful church.

After studying end-of-the-world movements, and building on Fritz Heider's work, Festinger and colleagues proposed a condition they call "cognitive dissonance": the tension we feel when one belief contradicts another, our actions, or our personal experience. We try to reduce that tension in any of several ways. Broadly, we can change our beliefs or try to change the world to fit our preconceptions. Sometimes the tension between belief and reality is so great that we double-down on our bets about the nature of the world, as did the Xhosa.

Not all contradictions create such tension. We are perfectly capable of holding several contradictory ideas, and compartmentalizing our lives to minimize inconsistencies. For instance, in the 1930s thousands of Western do-gooders clung to their idea of a beloved, imaginary Soviet Union, the egalitarian paradise, the ultimate expression of human aspiration, even as the real Bolshies murdered millions. I know teachers today who go out of their way to help the immigrant students in their classes, while at the same time supporting policies that tear immigrant families apart. We are quite skilled at adopting ideas that afford us comfort and prop up our prejudices, no matter how contradictory one with another.

Much harder to reconcile all these contradictions once we have made our commitments public. Taking a stand by definition takes away our room to maneuver. Sometimes I wonder if polling, or even careless conversation, are like measuring the location of electrons-- the act itself converts infinite possibility into one exclusive outcome.

If the world confirms our choices, all well and good. But, properly trained in churches and other political organizations, we don't change our beliefs just because reality refutes them. We hate to admit our mistakes, and we wriggle and squirm like worms on hooks-- the barbed hooks we have leaped upon with joy. So rationalization is a great skill to have when you've just voted for a scandal-plagued politician, and she loses, or you've voted for one and he wins.

(Sometimes I wonder whether democracy is another one of these ideas we hold through faith, despite the overwhelming evidence that gangsters rule, and always have, with only a few fleeting historical exceptions. For me, it comes down to this: The gangsters will always be with us, but so will people pushing back. Those who aren't gangsters have to fight against them. Freedom or slavery, physical and mental. In my lifetime there have been periods where things were getting better for a lot of people, because they stood up for themselves.)

Shame is the great liar. We are especially likely to intensify mistaken commitments in order to cover up foolishness, powerlessness, or criminal complicity.

In retrospect, we can see why some of the Millerites and Xhosa persisted despite disconfirmations. They had already made great investments in these prophecies, putting their families at risk. To turn their backs on their commitments so late in the game would expose them to great blame, ridicule and guilt. They would have to reexamine from top to bottom their understanding of the world. How shameful and humiliating! Today we have the double-down President, and millions desperate to follow him into the abyss, despite the lies, the failures, and so many deaths.

If misjudging prophecy and prophets is shameful, how much more humiliating must it be to acknowledge personal powerlessness. Many of us are pushed around at home, at school, at work, in the streets, and dare not push back. Over time there's a strong temptation to accept injustice as the natural way of the world, and unjust authority as legitimate, and to recast our coerced obedience as active approval. Thus we see low income people defending the property rights of the rich, and women dismissing President Trump's sexual assaults as "boys will be boys".

> The strongest form of the system justification hypothesis, which draws also on the logic of cognitive dissonance theory, is that under certain circumstances members of disadvantaged groups would be even more likely than members of advantaged groups to support the status quo (see

> Jost et al., 2003). If there is indeed a motivation to justify the system to reduce ideological dissonance and defend against threats to the system's legitimacy, then it may be that those who suffer the most because of the system are also those who would have the most to explain, justify, and rationalize. One way to minimize dissonance would be to redouble one's commitment and support for the system, much as hazed initiates pledge increased loyalty to the fraternity that hazes them (e.g., Aronson & Mills, 1959) and, presumably, to the fraternity system in general (Jost).

I would say an additional source of stress is the knowledge that some people still resist injustice. This infuriates people who have submitted, because it refutes their claim that they have no choice.

Finally, not a few of us must find ways to justify our complicity in great crimes, for it is the standard practice of the most successful gangsters to require their subordinates to rob and kill on command-- not just because many hands make light work, but even more, because it's the surest way to build loyalty. From the Good German to the 30K a year manager at some fast food franchise, forced to lay off workers or cut back their hours, to the dutiful citizen funding without murmur wars of conquest, we can deny or excuse our role, but it does take a certain mental agility.

Many times we enter into a course of action through a series of small steps; but once we're committed, we find it very hard to back out. Our justifications for the first steps make the next ones easier; sometimes we need to take the next steps to justify the first. Once you start a war, expanding it may be that the only way to "prove" it's worth the cost.

In the 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a classic series of experiments about obedience. Volunteers were asked to teach series of words to "learners" (really, people in cahoots with Milgram), and if they didn't remember, the volunteers were told to give the learners electric shocks. The shock machine was clearly labelled from 0 to 450 volts. Although many volunteers were reluctant to hurt the learners, the experimenter insisted. Little by little, the volunteers turned up the voltage until the learners were screaming in pretended pain. "In order to break off, [the volunteers] must suffer the guilt and embarrasment of acknowledging that they were wrong to begin at all. And the longer they put off quitting, the harder it is to admit their misjudgment in going as far as they have. It is easier to continue. Imagine how much less obedience there would be if subjects had to begin by giving the strongest shocks first" (Atkinson 739).

Kelman writes of "sanctioned massacres,"

> Authorization processes create a situation in which people become involved in an action without considering its implications and without really making a decision. Once they have taken the initial step, they are in a new psychological and social situation in which the pressures to continue are powerful. As Lewin (1947) has pointed out, many forces that might originally have kept people out of a situation reverse direction once they have made a commitment (once they have gone through the 'gate region') and now serve to keep them in the situation. For example,

> concern about the criminal nature of an action, which might originally have inhibited a person from becoming involved, may now lead to deeper involvement in efforts to justify the action and to avoid negative consequences (17-18).

Any good bureaucracy understands these principles and uses them to train its staff. Clerks start by covering up the boss' little "accounting errors"; cops start taking "Christmas gifts" from shopowners on the beat; soldiers look the other way while platoonmates beat the hell out of civilians. Later on these small collaborations grow into great crimes; and through long practice in trivial corruptions, the rapes and murders come easier. This is also part of the theory behind the Giulani crackdown on petty crime in New York, used in practice to justify racial profiling. The idea was that if people saw they or others could get away with minor offenses, if they thought no one cared, it would encourage them to dare bigger crimes.

We like to think we can't be caught by such shabby tricks, that we're immune to outside influence. That very confidence, however, can make us easy pickin's. Tavris and Aronson offer the example of drug companies wooing doctors:

> 'If a pharmaceutical company wants to give us pens, notepads, calendars, lunches, honoraria or small consulting fees, why not? We can't be bought by trinkets and pizzas.' According to surveys, physicians regard small gifts as being ethically more acceptable than larger gifts. . . . The evidence shows, however, that most physicians are influenced even more by small gifts than by big ones. . . . The reason Big Pharma spends so much on small gifts is well known to marketers, lobbyists, and social psychologists: Being given a gift evokes an implicit desire to reciprocate (52).
>
> But once reciprocity kicks in, self-justification will follow . . . . Once you take the gift, no matter how small, the process starts. You will feel the urge to give something back, even if it's only, at first, your attention, your willingness to listen, your sympathy for the giver. Eventually, you will become more willing to give your prescription, your ruling, your vote. Your behavior changes, but, thanks to blind spots and self-justification, your view of your intellectual and professional integrity remains the same (53).

This process helps explain why some officeholders sell themselves so cheaply, handing out billions to lobbyists for little more than the cost of tickets to Las Vegas or a few hours with prostitutes. Or how a self-proclaimed tough guy president comes to commit treason.

To cement our loyalty to unjust institutions, the key is to make us take responsibility for our actions on their behalf. In Mexico there is a saying, Obedezco pero no cumplo-- I obey, but I do not comply (Oppenheimer 269). In other words, I do what I'm told, but you can't make me admire or respect the boss; my mind at least is free. But this is an untenable position in the long run, because it requires us to admit our utter helplessness. Only where the powerful make little effort to disguise coercion --as with American slavery, for instance, or colonialism-- can we maintain that

stance for long. Introduce even small elements of choice, and we start to take responsibility for our actions, which leads us fairly directly to defending the status quo, and our bosses. In the Milgram torture experiments, "A 37-year-old welder explained that the experimenter was responsible for any pain the victim might suffer 'for the simple reason that I was paid for doing this. I had to follow orders. That's how I figured it'" (Wade, Tavris p. 649). He was paid! So he was just acting responsibly-- responsible to his employer, that is. In the aftermath of the Korean War,

> Psychologists were particularly interested in the unsettling success the Chinese achieved in getting them to change their beliefs about their own country's role in the war. They came to believe, for example, that the U.S. had engaged in germ warfare and had been the initial aggressors in starting the war. There was also an extremely high rate of collaboration with the enemy on the part of the POWs, ranging from benign activities such as running errands voluntarily to serious behaviors such as turning in fellow prisoners who tried to escape.
>
> The surprising thing about these belief changes and collaborations is that they occurred despite the absence of severe coercion. . . .
>
> One tactic used by the Chinese was to hold political essay contests. The prizes were kept exceedingly small —a few cigarettes, a bit of fruit— but the contests and prizes were sufficient to evoke interest from prisoners living in such desolate circumstances. In order to win the prize, the essay had to contain elements of a pro-Communist stand, even a token nod in that direction. In this way, the winning POW would obtain the prize only by providing support —however small— for the enemy's cause. While salting an essay with a few token statements in favor of communism might have seemed harmless to the POW under the circumstances, the important thing was that it was there in black-and-white and in his own handwriting. He could hardly deny having written it later. So how does he justify his behavior when the essay is trotted out late and shown to his fellow prisoners, his family, or the American press? By appealing to the cigarette or piece of fruit he was offered in return? Does such a paltry inducement justify 'aiding' the enemy in their propaganda campaign? . . .
>
> As [Robert] Cialdini goes on to say, we accept inner responsibility for our behavior when we think we have chosen to perform it in the absence of strong outside pressures. A strong reward or threat of punishment constitute such strong outside pressures. This implies that **in order to change people's beliefs, you must accomplish two things. First, you must get them to behave in a way that is inconsistent with their beliefs. Second, you must *make them take responsibility for their behavior* (italics mine). Faced with an inconsistency between their beliefs and their actions, most people will change their beliefs to bring them in line with their actions.**
>
> As unintuitive as this theoretical framework seems, it has been successfully tested repeatedly. (Cummins 19-20)

Discussing the Soviet Union during the purges, Brendon puts it more succinctly: "The gulf between what could be voiced and what could be thought was deep but it was also murky. For

what Stalin's subjects said with their lips tended to corrupt their minds." (p.491). Hegi's novel about Nazi Germany describes the same process. And that's why this feeble shadow that passes for democracy in the USA continues to weather the crises our leaders provoke: so long as we feel that we have a choice, how can we then repudiate what we have freely chosen?

So it matters a lot when we are drawn into collaboration with racists and rapists and liars. Once committed to them, it is *very* hard to back away, even as the costs rise. When we see our kids and neighbors sign on with the piggery, we can't just shrug our shoulders and say, O, no big deal, they'll realize their mistake soon enough.

**** Join the secret masters.**

There are a few people who are not fooled by the lies we are fed, who know what's really going on. You won't find them in the lamestream media. To join this invisible college requires rigorous mental and moral discipline, and countless midnight hours penetrating the Netta Oscura. But if you dig really deep, you might begin to begin to uncover who is behind world government and childhood vaccinations, how Sierra Club clones use CGI to manufacture their climate hoax horror, where Obama *really* came from (hint: look at his ears), the startling truths revealed when you read the bible backwards, and the terrifying secret of Syrian so-called "refugees".

Some people think they can figure things out by studying who makes decisions and what the results are. Ha-ha! We laugh out loud! Because the visible world is just a diversion for the mindless sheep. The real action takes place out of sight, in secret conclaves beneath the streets or in orbiting palaces. You have to have special access and special knowledge to decipher the signs, and not everyone has the guts to do it. Those tabloid headlines at the supermarket? Try reading them in Sanskrit. The recent eclipse? That wasn't the *Earth's* shadow. Take the Hang Seng index from the last twelve days of December, add twelve, and divide by twelve. Shocking, isn't it? *Now* you're beginning to see.

But most people refuse to admit the truth. They can't handle it. The fools, the suckers, the weak-minded will never understand. Fortunately for mankind, there is a small, dedicated brotherhood of bloggers and talk show hosts, acolytes of alternative fact from all over the world, who have the training and courage to seek the truth beyond the veil. The fate of the world is in our hands.

**** Suck up.**

The idea is to join the entourage of the local strong man, and serve him by doing whatever he needs-- kick back part of my salary, collect taxes, rat out and beat up dissenters, sabotage rivals, vote ten times on election day . . . . In return, I get to compete with the rest of the entourage for the crumbs the big man brushes from his table-- bail, a menial job, the Scrooge turkey at Christmas, any of a thousand small and smaller favors. At the same time, my guy is likely the client of an even bigger big man. I prosper if my guy moves up. That is to say, the more he can steal from my neighbors, the bigger the morsels he can pass on to me.

Clientelism is an ancient form of organization, predating, no doubt, the first city-states. It integrates individuals at the very bottom of the social strata into long chains of boss-subordinate

relationships that can reach to the top of society. It is the basis of big-city political machines, rural fiefdoms, deserving-poor charity, traditional sex relationships (patron--patriarch. Get it?) and the Clinton 2016 presidential juggernaut, whose progress you could follow by watching the long train of Democrats bobbing like pigeons as they followed the trail of golden breadcrumbs to the White House. (Or was it to the dunghill of history?)

No need to speculate as to why our leaders are so determined to tear up what's left of the social safety net. It's not just that they don't want to help pay for it. Even more important, they want to squeeze out any possibility that the rest of us can live without groveling for their handouts. In a cutthroat society, clientelism may be the last refuge for people who have nothing to trade but their loyalty.

This kind of dependency may also explain in part the vicious attitudes towards immigrants by many people who rarely see people of color except on TV. If my status and job prospects both depend on where I fit into a highly local, personalized client network, then naturally I fear an inflow of people who don't know me and have their own networks and alliances. I don't see how I can fit in or take advantage.

I suppose churches represent the most expansive form of clientelism, linking us poor mortals to the divine. Exploring the complex religious landscape of Brazil, Ireland contrasts egalitarian, communitarian churches with others more hierarchically inclined.

> But the new priests do not teach about the saints and do not seem to believe in miracles. They call people together to discuss problems, says Gonçalo, but there is no point in that, 'each man knows his own problems.' As priests fail in their duties, he laments, miracles happen less now than when he was young. This is disastrous for the poor, for, as Gonçalo understands it, the world stays the same, and the poor may hope only in miracles and the protection of patrons. His critique of the new priests asserts the links that must not be broken between the obedience and loyalty of the poor man, the good priest, and the hierarchy of patrons— . . . his stories of religious heroes, his images of priest-centered community, and his myths of hope in patron saints contain a model of citizenship. . . . The good and sensible citizen accepts inequality and a lowly position in a social hierarchy; but, in return for respect and loyal service, he expects protection from the insecurities of poverty and inclusion in networks of personally distributed largesse. . . . The humblest citizen, as due reward for loyalty and astuteness, can expect inclusion in a visible, manipulable community through which material resources and the amenities of civilization flow. . . . He will have nothing to do with P[adre] Eduardo's communities --not only because it seems absurd to think of communities of the poor adrift from patronage but also because the attempt to establish them was destructive toward the good order and correct behavior that remained. For Pe. Eduardo, Goncalo reserved the bitter anger and contempt due to one subversive of all that was good and true. . . . he recognized in Pe. Eduardo the agent of a hostile paradigm . . . the grass-roots communitarian paradigm. (pp. 38-9)

Further:

> "Diana Brown has shown in her case studies how Umbanda may restore broken lines of patronage in urban areas, helping to incorporate submissive lower-class members of systems in systems of economic and political exchange that maintain domination by elites. . . . Silverstein brings out the religiously masked dependence of cult groups on white upper-class resources . . . a system of lower-class survival through incorporation into an upper-class patronage system." (p.142)

I know of no comparable analysis for the U.S.A. Perhaps churches here don't operate that way.

You don't have to be a true believer to be a suck-up. I met a black woman, ex-military, in an adult reading class. She explained to me that the system is rigged, but that she was going to learn how to play the game to get what she wants. Apparently she counted on others to run interference for her. When nursing students tried to crowd an unfair, abusive teacher, this woman said she just nodded and smiled, so that teacher and classmates thought she was on their side. She said the protesting students would never succeed because they wouldn't stick together --though from her description they sounded pretty well united-- and that some of them wouldn't pass the course anyhow.

I got the feeling that she was furious at both bosses and peers, and felt it was a day's work well done to see classmates fail and teachers flattered into giving her special consideration. I think people who are pushed around a lot, especially as kids, get angry at their family and community for letting it happen, for not protecting them, and grow up unwilling to trust anything but their own cleverness and power to do unto others before they do it to you. This woman was following Ellison's prescription to "undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction," but it wasn't the bosses' destruction she celebrated; she needs them more than they need her.

So there are lots of ways to join a gang. None of these require any great skill, though, and we face a lot of competition from all the other people who have lost jobs, health insurance, or family support. We may have to beat up a lot of our neighbors to catch the boss' eye. Clientelism does not offer a very rewarding career path, but in lots of places it may be the best one available.

**** Collective action.**

Or we could work together for the common good. Not such a radical idea. People have been cooperating since our ancestors ran down wildlife on the savannah. But it requires a different set of assumptions about people and the world than what I've explored above. To cooperate we have to come to agreement on common goals and strategies, and how to hold each other accountable. We need compromise and common ground, communications skills, space for individual initiative, and trust enough to deal with conflict.

For decades many of our unions and community organizations danced around questions of race, gender, class and the environment, for fear of igniting endless squabbles among the membership. Some organizers took it as a fundamental principle to focus on the narrow issues on which we could all agree, be it street signs or better wages. With regards to race, the idea was that,

after cooperating for years with men and women from all backgrounds --all without mentioning the word *racism*, of course-- when racist sexist push comes to shove we would naturally join hands in solidarity.

But such an assumption is totally unrealistic. Unless explicitly challenged, our ideas persist even against contrary experience. Look at Yugoslavia, or Iraq, places where people lived side by side for decades; once the state collapsed, they were at each other's throats within weeks. (It's worthwhile to keep in mind that it's a few corrupt politicians who initiate ethnic cleansing every time; but they choose that strategy because it works.) Only for folks with few prior understandings about race --i.e. some young people-- does living and working with people of other backgrounds translate easily into solidarity. And while blue-collar union members are less likely to support racism than than non-union members, still there have been massive defections to racist politicians-- who also, not coincidentally, aim to smash unions. We fear dividing our members if we raise tough questions, but the fact is, whether we raise these issues or not, the piggery will, and will take advantage of our short-sighted lack of trust in our colleagues.

Collective action doesn't work very well if we have to constitute a new coalition from scratch every time we want to get something done. We need long-lasting agreements on a big set of interrelated issues, based on knowing and trusting each other. We need to talk, listen, and learn from our experience. We need to devise solutions that help us all. We need democracy.

§ <u>Can we talk? Let's apply our understanding</u>.

Let's say my description of common attitudes is more or less accurate (however incomplete). What good does it do us? My hope is that it can serve as a point of departure for lots of discussion; that at the least we begin to understand each other better; and that maybe in talking about our ideas we come to choose those that serve us better. Here I'll sketch out a few ways we might be able to further the conversation, only a few of which I've had the chance to test.

**** Premises.** There's been gobs written about democratic process and "popular education". Here I'll just describe some of my operating assumptions about engaging with folks about politics.

● We do this work from necessity. We need help if we're ever going to turn things around in this place. We need each other.

● A few folks we needn't bother with, those who have committed to a life of crime and are rich enough to buy out of the consequences. But most of us are somewhere in the middle-- we benefit in some ways from war, pollution, race-to-the-bottom economics, and the culture of useless consumerism, but we also lose, too. So our self-interest can be calculated many ways; and we can help each other figure out a way that works best for most people. We should never turn our backs on the tens of millions now in thrall to the gangsters. We are not better than them. We need them, if democracy is ever to work.

● Despite the Fakes News noise machine, we have access to competing stories and values-- those handed to us by the institutions, and those we rework, make up, or cobble together as we go along. By examination, we can choose the ones that serve us best.

● Choosing the more accurate understanding doesn't mean we lose the old false stories, though. Describing how the operators beat striking miners in Harlan, KY, Portelli notes that both sides claimed to have God on their side, but the bosses were more persuasive:

> The powerless, the poor, the unschooled groped toward interpretations of their own, but are constantly exposed to the powerful interpretations of the elites. They may risk the lonesome and doubtful effort of creating their own meanings; but when this fails, it is too easy and tempting to go back to the warmth and security of those authorized interpretations which even the insurgents carried inside them all the time anyway. (233)

From which I conclude that once we choose a more honest path we have to continually remind ourselves why we made that choice and where we hope it leads.

● Useful discussion starts with personal experience. Fakes News already ratifies our lousy ideas. Hearing neighbors tell of experience similar to our own helps confirm our good ideas, which are always based in reality.

What is not always based on experience, but can be a kind of inventory of understandings, are answers to the question, What do you know about this issue? asked at the git-go. Usually folks know a lot, and learn more by pooling their information. The answers can help us identify attitudes, accuracies, misunderstandings, and points where additional information would help; sometimes these become clear to the speakers themselves as they try to explain.

● So another reason to start with folks' personal experience is to avoid the slogans we all know by heart, and to reconstruct our conclusions on a more thoughtful and inclusive basis, taking into consideration what others have to say, the various paradigms we have available to us, and new ones we can sketch out together. Starting with our own stories offers us a chance to wander off from our usual recitations, and maybe reinterpret the meaning of what we have seen. We can explore the range of explanations to see which fits best, before the concrete sets. It's when we commit to an an idea first, then try to crop our experience to fit it, that we become such facile liars. In practice, this means that we start with questions about what folks have actually seen and felt, rather than their conclusions or borrowed bumper sticker about what it all means.

● Normally we talk politics only when some important issue has come up, with some impending decision or action to take. That's an advantage in some ways: if we're going to do this hard work we want folks to be ready to act.

On the other hand, we can't wait till election time to do the work of building relationships and trust. We can't wait until our organizations are split apart, or until another manly man shoots up another shopping mall, to talk about racism and sexism. We can't wait until the next financial crisis to talk about corporate crime. Some of these issues are complicated; all have been obscured by the people who profit the most. At the same time, all this criminal activity goes on every day,

in between crises, and we can see it if we're looking. We are nowhere near the worst of the climate crisis, and yet most of us can see the effects just by looking out the window, or at the sky where the roof used to be.

● We have no incentive to poke our heads out from our ideological bunkers unless we see a real chance to make a difference. It's only when we feel we have the power to change things that we take responsibility for the result. Some of that sense of power comes from hearing each other. Then we are ready to stop cowering behind our slogans, and we start to look for real-world solutions.

● Robert Frost wrote,

> I wonder
> If I could put a notion in his head: . . .
> "Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
> That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
> But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
> He said it for himself.

It matters less what people hear from outside agitators than what we say ourselves. When we say something in public, we are making a kind of commitment that can be the first step to action. Put it another way: skip the lectures. Get a mix of folks in the room, spark a discussion, ask good questions, listen intently, let folks put their world into words. That's the most lasting and motivating form of learning.

● The authoritarian impulse is not a belief, it's a set of responses to economic and political terrorism. Bigotry, hypercontrolling behavior and the demand for daddy to take care of us flourish when we are insecure. Our present circumstances of radical displacement by religious war, corporate technology and environmental devastation are the perfect culture in which to grow these pathogens. So, first and foremost, what will make the world a better place is to make the world a better place. People with secure jobs in safe communities, with good schools and plenty of access to social services, with opportunities to make valued contributions to their communities--such people make lousy Nazis.

A few months before the Nazis killed that counterprotestor in Charlottesville VA, NPR interviewed Christian Picciolini, who'd spent years with violent racist groups, then quit, then founded the non-profit Life After Hate. Asked how he connects with racists, Picciolini said,

> You know, I tend to like to listen to people more than I speak because when I listen, they always inadvertently give me the clues on what potholes existed in their lives that deviated their path down a certain way. And then my job is to fill those potholes. And usually, it's just about injecting a different perspective.
>
> I don't ever battle with anybody ideologically because I think that that just polarizes us further. And when I listen and they tell me and I fill those potholes with, you know, opportunity. I try to find partners that can make these people more resilient, whether they hate or not. Because once you're

more resilient and you're more secure, ideology and fear tends to go away because there's nobody to blame anymore.

That makes sense. It's the same dynamic by which gang members tend to mellow out as they get older.

Right now, though, we're in no position to help folks become more secure and resilient, except on the smallest of scales. Sometimes carelessly, sometimes deliberately, the people at the helm of the great institutions have done their best to dismantle the modicum of stability afforded us as a result of a century of grassroots action, plus a generation of prosperity following World War II. It's a particularly intractable chicken-and-egg problem: we can't build a just society while rich racists hold every lever of power, but it's very hard to elbow them aside while their crimes keep reproducing new followers.

What's more, people can be living high off the hog and still be vicious bigots. The Trumpist and Tea Party core are not the folks on the edge, but middle class white people. They've lost some degree of status and dominance, but they are still relatively well off (Miller, Lind). (Just as plenty of religious terrorists come from materially coddled if intellectually and emotionally impoverished households.) Once we get authoritarian ideas in our heads, they don't go away just because we can fill our bellies.

So we got to use our words. Sure, we need to protect the freedoms we have left --Social Security, safety and health laws, due process, all the infrastructure that relieve somewhat the vicious competition of robot-era transnational capitalism. At the same time, we have got to engage our neighbors in talking through our problems. Most of us are not Nazis. We don't get off on hurting people. We are all scared. We're smart, too, and motivated. If soldiers and athletes can control their fear and exhaustion, if members of support groups can talk each other out of destructive behaviors, we can also figure out how to control and work around our most dangerous and desperate political choices.

Finally, for those who might feel that talking across the borders just holds us back from direct action; who might wonder why we should pay attention to people less enlightened than ourselves, I would ask in return that we reflect on what democracy is all about. It's one thing for an election campaign with limited time and resources to prioritize turning out the base. (How did that work for you, Robby Mook?) It's a more dangerous proposition in the long term to write off tens of millions of our neighbors. Do we think we can build a more fair society without buy-in and active participation by the majority? If we're willing to turn our backs on so many people, what does that say about us? And how would that be different from Trumpist ideas about people and government?

**** Honest talk takes trust.**

When I was teaching, classroom climate was one of the things we learned to attend to. We wanted students to feel welcomed, supported, encouraged, respected, interested, confident, clear about our purposes and organized without feeling confined. When we are in essence teaching each other, a nurturing climate is all the more important. Just about every organizational development manual has a chapter on how to hold honest, productive discussions, so I won't reprise all that. Instead I'll comment on what I think is the most important element: trust.

Effective give-and-take, and collective action in general, depend first of all on trusting relationships, which in turn depend on participants' shared goals, sincere curiosity, and willingness to take risks and suspend judgment. Otherwise, not only do we not understand each other's situations and points of view, we don't even listen. Rather, we tend to dismiss out of hand any contrary ideas.

Lots of us trust the boss more than our neighbors. And we can scarcely overestimate the intense feelings of betrayal that drive so much of the rightist response to movements of liberation.[3] So we've got a lot of work to do.

Start from common ground.

Neuroscientist Tali Sharot says we can circumvent our common strong tendency to resist contrary ideas by reframing our arguments to emphasize shared goals:

> Recently Andreas Kappes and I, together with others, conducted a study to try to understand what goes on inside the brain when people are confronted with opinions that contradict their own. We recorded the brain activity of pairs of individuals who were making financial decisions together, and found that when a duo disagreed, their brains immediately became less sensitive to the information presented by the other person. However, when they agreed, each person's brain activity reflected precise encoding of the information provided by the other.
>
> What this implies is that to elicit change we must first identify arguments that rely on common ground.
>
> Take the alleged link between autism and childhood vaccines. Just like Carson, many health professionals attempt to change parents' decisions not to allow vaccinations of their children, by presenting them with data that suggests there is no link. However, studies show that the approach has little impact.
>
> To solve this problem a group of scientists came up with a new idea; instead of trying to persuade people that the MMR vaccine does not cause autism, they would remind them that it protects children from deadly illnesses. In the heated debate, people had forgotten what measles, mumps and rubella were.
>
> Everyone agreed that the vaccine would protect children from these illnesses and everyone's priority was the child's health. Focusing on what they had in common rather than what they disagreed upon was successful -- people's attitudes towards vaccines changed three times as much than when following the CDC's standard approach.

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[3] Here's an example: "As we have heard, feminists and nonfeminists alike value children, choices, and femininity. If one could peel back the layers and examine the differences between the two groups —both of which claim they want equality and respect for their gender— what would the heart of the matter reveal? The critical difference is that nonfeminists feel that the very core of their being —their ego and self-identity— is threatened by feminists"-- (Henry 271).

Whether we're talking about jobs or health or safe communities, many of us do want similar outcomes; we can start with those goals and work back from there as to how we achieve them.

Then there are an array of cultural identifiers we can use. Before we engage around tough topics, some professional facilitator types suggest we start by acknowledging these "shared signifiers", faith, football and the flag chiefest among them. Here the idea is not so much to remind us of common goals, but of our common membership in the same tribe. My reservation about pledging allegiance at the git-go is that it puts off-limits some of the ideas we need to challenge.

After all, racism could be one of those shared signifiers that puts many people at ease, knowing we're in the right company, and at times do-gooders have not been ashamed to play it. This is how William Cobbett protested mistreatment of England's working poor: "[I]t is enough to fill us with indignation to hear them whine over the sorrows of a fat and greasy negro in Jamaica . . . while their own countrymen are found in such a condition under their very eyes" (Herzog pp.198-9). Some of the early U.S. feminists likewise complained that undeserving black men could vote while women could not (Ortberg). Racism can unite men and women, rich and poor, and, carefully directed, different ethnic groups against a common enemy. But that's not the kind of collective action we are looking to build.

What's more, borrowing rightist slogans is more likely to strengthen authoritarians than democratic movements. Some women demanded respect, and the right to chastise wayward men, by virtue of their special role as mothers and guardians of religion; such a formula could only undermine early feminist efforts. I'd say the recent campaign to legalize same-sex marriage helps legitimize an inherently problematical instrument of patriarchy.

Most frequently, we cite Scripture to make our case. But such arguments simply substitute one unaccountable authority for another. In all of history, only very rarely have religious liberals managed to win ideological battles against the religious right. In this country Christian abolitionists fought for decades to upend slavery (and refute its many Christian apologists) but in the end it wasn't religious righteousness that prevailed but the Unionist weapons industry. Today it's white Christians --those who most ferociously proclaim their religiosity-- who flock to the Confederate banners of racist politicians.

Lewy notes that in the 1930s Germany's Catholic bishops tried to counter Nazi influence by stressing their own patriotism. "All in all, it is doubtful whether the nationalistic confessions of the bishops prevented many Catholic would-be Nazis from joining the party. The Nazis were always able to outdo the bishops' patriotism. . . . Instead of taking the wind out of the sails of the extreme right, the constant stress on devotion to the fatherland helped make nationalism more respectable without really convincing those who questioned the Church's devotion to the national cause." We see this again and again: let do-gooders accept any part of injustice, and folks have little reason to prefer them to the more coherent, more powerful authoritarians.

Belenky et al suggest a better authority: the experience we have in common.

> As the class went along, although people became more supportive, they also grew more and more critical. . . . People could criticize each other's work in this class and accept each other's criticisms because members of the group shared a similar experience. This is the only sort of expertise

> connected knowers recognize, the only sort of criticism they easily accept. Authority in connected knowing rests not on power or status or certification but on commonality of experience. (p.118)

If we trust only people with similar experience, though, how can we come to understand experience beyond our own? As always, we start with what we have in common. All of us have or had families. Sooner or later we all get sick. Much of what Indian women go through should be readily accessible to women in the States.

It's as we get the details of our neighbors' stories that we notice where their experiences diverge from our own. Then we ask more questions. Then, if we are brave and persistent, new worlds of knowledge and possibility open up.

Room for everyone-- with questions.

A commonplace, but it bears repeating: effective facilitators help make everyone feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts, and make sure the most confident don't take up all the space. It's fine if participants are reluctant to talk about subjects with which they have little personal experience or other knowledge, but we value the experience they do have, and want to hear about it. Sometimes we can get wrapped up in the minutiae of arcane personal pursuits and conflicts, but initiators can model ways to tell personal stories that partake of common experience.

We accept each other's experience but we can question the interpretations and suggest alternatives. Perhaps it's not the Jews behind the World Trade Organization, or gay people who cause hurricanes.

In these discussions some of us --famously, but not exclusively, old guys like me-- insist on displaying our ignorance, and proudly assert vast claims innocent of any relation to reality. We can counter that effectively by speaking from our experience and by adding well-sourced information when questions come up. How do you know? is a perfectly good question to ask each other.

At the same time, I'd resist the tempation to stake out beforehand who can talk about what. That's what the piggery does, so that moms, for instance, are seen to have no right to speak about nuclear power. Reality itself is undivided, and all of us live here and feel the effects. This essay itself violates the idea that we may only speak from our own experience, because I am deliberately trying to explore and understand what other folks might be thinking. That's what the human animal does.

Something I've heard a couple times is, You can't know my experience. But that's why we have words. To my mind, the problem is not so much that we are ignorant beyond our limited personal sphere --to which education is the antidote-- but the much louder megaphone some people wield behind much higher pulpits. Corporate lies and bribes protected by the Supreme Court's astounding novel definition of free speech. Talk show multimillionaires claiming to be persecuted by "political correctness." The common presumption by old white guys that old white guys have more to say than everyone else.

A recent president criticized students who tried to block a speech by his predecessor's secretary of state, one of the architects of mass murder in Iraq. Of course those students could not and were not trying to prevent this politician from commenting like any citizen might. They objected to her

getting a stage to herself, sponsored by their university; why should this criminal's voice be privileged above so many others? Dismantle these mechanisms and practices, make space for all voices, we'll have more truthful conversations.

Clarify expectations and commitments.

I know a guy who constantly complains about the family and friends who have failed him. He plunges into relationships with great enthusiasm, and drops them months later in bitter disappointment, reaffirming his conviction that he can't rely on anyone. From what I can gather, his expectations are both unrealistic and unspoken. He assumes other people want the same things he wants. He expects people to know what he wants without telling them --every decent person should know how to act right! he thinks-- and imputes malice to them when they don't measure up. Not coincidentally, he works hard to ingratiate himself with authority figures, while badmouthing them behind their backs.

I also know people who try the communications thing over and over again, without result. The other person doesn't understand, or doesn't care, or gets all defensive. When raising questions simply intensifies conflict without resolving anything, it makes us not even want to try. Resentments fester in silence.

In part I think communication failures stem from the very narrow sense of responsibility many of us feel to the people around us. In this very strange society we claim it a virtue not to care what other people think, and a humiliation to pay attention.

Maybe distrust derives also from a lack of skill and structure. It doesn't come naturally to most of us to focus on solving problems instead of laying blame, and the immediate incentives are all to paper over problems rather than tackle them head-on. In theory communication should be easier within and among community groups, because they have to have some kind of process and structure for sharing ideas, questions and fears. Unfortunately, in some organizations the very act of raising questions is so rare that people freak out. Instead of seeing sharing concerns as the central act of community, they see it as threatening and divisive.

Even more important, I think we tend to have unrealistic expectations of each other, and don't communicate them. When we see our own experience as the norm, and think our big decisions are obvious choices between right and wrong, and see evil intent behind decisions we don't like, and think that people in general are weak and wicked, and figure coercion is the only way to get others to act right . . . why, naturally trust is hard to come by. We got to try it, though, because otherwise we are alone and helpless against the gangsters.

I see it as largely a question of self-interest, and how much we are aware of it. Schooled by corporate consumerism, we've become practiced at expressing what we want to buy or have other people do for us, but just as it takes months for a baby to have a sense of self distinct from its mom, we don't always consider that what's best for us is not the same as what's best for other people. We aren't always conscious of our own self-centeredness, and so are sometimes shocked when others don't see things the same way. And the less we know about our own motivations, the less able we are to sustain commitments either to personal relationships or to political action.

So let's ask some questions: Ever heard the expression, I've got your back? What does that mean, really? To whom do we give unconditional support? So why should we expect that from others? What would it take, what would another person have to do, for me to be able to count on

her? What would I have to know about other people to be ready to make promises to them? Has anyone ever tried to force you to do something? How did that work? **Why would any of us help each other?** and so on.

Long-term relationships foster trust. Understanding each other's point of view, reframing ideas and solving problems together take time. Also: as plenty of research attests, we are less likely to cheat people with whom we have built strong relationships, because we have come to rely on them; it would be costly to lose their good will.

However, we don't always have the luxury of kinship or deep and abiding friendships. We got to do politics with people we barely know. Coming to know them is part of the process, but we can't wait till everyone is perfectly comfortable. It's never easy to talk about what we need and how to get it.

Reach out across the boundaries.

Be good if many, many of us were engaged in political conversation with the folks we know already. If you're like me, though, you hang out mostly with people like yourself. To make this democracy business work we need to reach beyond the usual suspects. Very hard, but not impossible. Sometimes we invite a bunch of people to a special meeting at the university or the left-wing church. What that usually gets us is the same cast of characters.

Alternatively, there are lots of volunteer groups that meet regularly and regularly invite guest speakers. As outsiders we don't have strong relationships with these folks, but they know and trust each other. And that can be the basis for fruitful conversations.

I remember going with immigrants to talk about immigration policy with neighborhood, church and labor groups. As outsider initiators we didn't stick around, but hoped our hosts would continue the conversation formally or informally among themselves. In the best organized efforts, which ours was not, there are ways to support a small core within the larger host group to continue the discussion and hopefully lead to action. That was true with the HERE union local, which had a strong, ongoing education program. Months after my colleague and I had a chance to talk with them, some of the (white male) rank and file were defending immigrants to their Congressperson. Some churches, too, have social justice committees that keep prompting congregants to move from talk to collective action.

I know educators often touch on questions of democracy in social studies and language classes, especially at university. That's a bit of a different situation, because students don't necessarily have much relationship with each other unless the prof makes a point to encourage it. The big advantage with classes is that we can revisit tough issues from several angles over time. Rightists have made it a practice to target educators who dare talk about the world outside the hollowed halls, but when we tell the truth, and when class members all join in --when the focus is on their responses, and not the initiator's-- it's hard for liars to find points of attack.

I had some good conversations with students in an adult GED class. What made that possible was not just the opportunity afforded by my authority as a teacher, but also the fact that the students outnumbered me and felt comfortable pushing back when they disagreed with me.

Often times, once we raise an important topic we can let others carry the discussion. Then our main role becomes asking questions, maybe offering context and suggesting linkage among issues.

If some people say doubtful or ugly things, there are usually other participants who will challenge them. In any case, the most important words are not those they hear from the convenors, but those they say themselves.

Why should I care? Identify shared self-interest.

As outside initiators we need to be quite candid about our agendas. If we are promoting a particular policy, no sense in pretending otherwise; folks will see right through us. They know we haven't entered here because it's raining outside. So lay that on the table up front. It's also true that part of our agenda is building alliances, and that makes sense to many people. Here, too, it's important to clarify expectations.

Likewise, to be effective, we seek to engage our hosts in terms of their own self-interest. The initiators know why they've come. What do the other participants get out of this work?

Obviously, in a guest-speaker situation, folks do not attend primarily to hear the outsider, but to take care of the main business of the group. Last month it was the garden lady, and next time the Neighborhood Watch will come to speak. So most people are prepared only to listen politely.

We engage them by asking about their experience. If we are bringing to the table truly significant issues, whether race or gender or jobs, war, immigration, student debt, health care, clean water, taxes, the surveillance industry . . . probably there will be people in the room for whom these do matter, a lot. (Whether they'll say so depends on how much they trust us.)

When we're facing political problems, we can't get what we need without allies, and we can't get allies without understanding what others need in return, and how they see the world. We could start with the most basic question: What are y'all trying to do? What do you want? Then it becomes clearer how the political issues affect what the group and its members hope to achieve--and what we can expect from each other.

Sometimes the host organization itself is dealing with challenges directly related to core issues I've mentioned above. Sometimes it faces internal stresses and needs to head off confusion or conflict among its members. The kind of discussion proposed here can help participants get to the heart of the conflict, develop trust among allies, and respond effectively to outside forces.

Otherwise, who cares?-- our proselytizing presence is just a way for them to pass the time, a traveling circus, a few minutes' entertainment at best.

More on this below.

Got to talk about privilege. Got to do it right.

What is our purpose in talking about privilege?

Are we looking for apologies, or forgiveness, or self-justification? Are we competing for position and recognition in the hierarchy of the oppressed? Or are we trying to figure out how to trust other people, so that we can work with them? I suggest that the last of these possibilities is both most achievable and most useful. Religious people are big on confession, so's they can get into heaven. Unreality TV likewise thrills to pointing fingers and showers of tears. But politics is not redemption, nor therapy, it's about solving shared problems.

For me, it's important to talk about and acknowledge privilege in order to bust out of our ignorance of how we got here, so we can devise better paths, and to break free of our self-justifying rationales of superiority, so that we can really see each other's situations and the different schedule

of choices each of us faces. If we can get over the smug moralism that presumes we can judge good and bad the same way in all circumstances --Why don't they just get a job? and Why don't they just quit getting shot by the police?-- we can start thinking about changing those circumstances. But if we want to discourage self-serving self-righteousness we might try to avoid wallowing in it ourselves.

Talking frankly about privilege is an integral part of building trust, but there are other elements, other building blocks, and we ought not take on the privilege piece in isolation. Again, what's in it for us? Like Christians seeking converts, we engage with people who admit they need help, and allies, and a way forward. Beneath all the layers of insulation, many privileged people know that exclusive privilege is not sustainable.

When we get to that point, initiators should be the first to acknowledge our own privilege, whatever it is. (Perhaps people in jail, or native people, or immigrants deported back to war zones have no privilege worth mentioning.) This is not to level or trivialize the big differences in allocations of privilege, but to understand that privilege, unprivilege and exploitation take many forms and don't neatly divide us into two mutually exclusive pools. (What else would you expect a rich old white guy to say? It's true, nonetheless, and important to understand if we are serious about looking for allies.) More immediately, in talking about ourselves in a frank and matter-of-fact manner, we invite others to reflect about their own situations without feeling super defensive.

Second, let's distinguish between privileges built on exploiting other people, which we need to erase, and benefits that have been allocated to a few people, but should be shared with all.

Third, let's recognize that the respect that accrues to us from our privileged status is often as important as the material advantages. For some folks, status depends our place on the ladder, and having someone to look down on. But we can build relationships of respect outside of unearned privilege. I know folks who respect others and themselves without standing on someone else's throat, and I think that all of us can access that understanding. Teachers know that they can help their students most when they value the positive contributions of each. I reckon that holds for adults, too. We value each other for the best things about us. And I don't mean the kind of sentimental smarm politicians display at veterans' centers, or birthday parties for centenarians. To value someone we have to know something about them, which means we got work to do.

In no way do I suggest we hold each other's hands while we whimper about our lost manhood. Fuck that. We have real qualities that we can admire in each other, and need to.

Fourth, we have to recognize that many privileged people don't feel so very lucky. Maybe the 1% take their palaces for granted, and think it's so cute that some of us choose to live on the streets. There's a much bigger middle ground of people who experience both privilege and loss. Take the situation of older white blue collar men. While still considerably richer than comparably educated black people, the white guys have experienced death rates quite extraordinary for a rich country. Lots of factors contribute, but recent studies highlight the relative decline of their social and economic standing over the past generation, correlated with increased suicide, drug abuse and other "diseases of despair". (Guo. See also Faludi.) So groups abandoned by the corporations and less able to claim special status for race and gender don't much see their still substantial privilege. They are grief-struck for what they've lost, and see little hope for the future.

That's why it's helpful to talk about privilege and exclusion along several continua, of race and class and age and gender and several other markers of our place in this society. Again, this is not

to claim false equivalence among very different intensities of privilege and dispossession, but to start picking apart a centuries-old tangle of beliefs and institutions. We are trying to dig ourselves out of a terrible mess. Privilege gets in the way, even for the privileged. Rather than trampling each other to get our snouts in the slop, we can take care of each other.

Coalition work is hard.

Can't say I'm entirely sure how to peel away unfair privilege while still treating the privileged with respect, but I know it can and must be done. Why? Because if we want to make justice we can't afford to dismiss tens of millions of people as cavalierly as do the corporados. Democracy doesn't work when half of us are in sabotage mode.

Some of us will say, Why should I spend one minute more with the kind of people who misjudged and mistreated me and my family for generations? Certainly it's unfair for women and people of color and GLBTQ folks to continue to bear so much of the costs of educating the gringos. But we don't reach out because it's fair or easy or gets us into heaven. We engage with people different from us because we need them (just as they need us, whether they know it yet or not). We prioritize where we'll invest limited resources first. We make no deals with one set of allies at the expense of others. We don't drop race and gender justice as key elements in all our work-- we have seen again and again how the gangsters take advantage when we tiptoe around these issues.

Nor may we dismiss a huge part of the middle class any more than we can turn our backs on women or low income people. We can't rebuild democracy without (nearly) everyone taking part. (The 1% of people who own twice as much of the nation's wealth as the bottom 90% [Saez Table 1], yeah, we might could get by without their contributions to the community.)

> You don't go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive.
>
> --Bernice Johnson Reagon

**** Class divides.**

I wrote above about dis-/trust and coalition, but there's one more big piece I want to touch on, because it seems so central to the political landscape and possibilities.

Personal antagonisms intensify when they merge with the fault lines of racism, patriarchy and class conflict. We've seen again and again since President Reagan how politicians have mobilized the ferocious backlash by white middle class and working class Christians in defense of corporations and white men's dominance. Despite heroic efforts here and there, people on the left have failed to effectively counter the strategy of divide and rule. Finally we learned to pay attention to race and gender justice, but until the 2016 election many of us had lost sight of how class operates in our society.

That's in part because we see few incentives and no obvious pathways to work across class lines—especially the chasms dividing blue- and pink-collar workers and farmworkers from farmers, entrepreneurs and low-level managers of the middle class, and from professional class

people like myself. Some of us don't even try. And we live with the result, 40 years of Reaganism with no end in sight.

I bring this up as a guy with a graduate degree who last saw the inside of a factory in 1975. It's not just that the consultancy often conclude that it's more important to mobilize the base than to reach beyond it (worked for President Trump but not so much for his opponents). I see other barriers as well, even less tractable, stemming from the classes' distinct positions in the economy and social structure, and our diverging fortunes since Reagan. The corporados have eviscerated the unions, cut the Democratic Party loose from its working class constituents (was there a huddle of somber men in white coats, deciding, The patient is moribund, time to pull the plug--?), and robotized or outsourced the manufacturing sector itself.

During and following the peak of the antiwar and civil rights movements of the 1960s, thousands of activists radiated into factories and small towns and big-city neighborhoods, strengthening grassroots groups across the country. Now, where I live, few liberals stray from the Unitarian-university axis. The rightists have largely achieved their great strategic goal of cordoning off blue- and pink-collar workers and middle class business people. Of course, democracy continues to bubble up in every community, no matter how thoroughly girded about with churches, cameras, and the Putin media; but it's hard for these little oases to thrive in isolation.

Economic insecurity.

By all accounts it was middle class white Christians, especially men, enraged by the ongoing loss of status and economic privilege, who determined the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. (We can't say they won; the billionaires won.)

To be clear: while President Trump won substantial working class support, " . . . at least as responsible for Trump's victory: middle-class and wealthy suburban whites, who also came out in droves for Trump and who make up a larger part of his coalition" (Sasson). Some of us think of Trumpists as working class high school grads because there was a measurable shift, as some who'd voted for Obama switched to Mr. Trump in 2016; but the trend has been there for decades. "Two-thirds (67%) of non-college whites backed Trump," in 2016, as compared with the 61% who supported GOP candidate Romney four years earlier (Tyson and Maniam). Unlike Romney's, Trump's position against current trade policy clearly contrasted with the Democrats'. We should also note that black people's support for Democrats showed a similar drop between 2012 and 2016 (Tyson)-- from a much higher base, of course.

Beyond the numbers, many of us like to think our college educations make us smarter, less susceptible to President Trump's savage appeal. But clearly racism and sexism play a much bigger role than education, rightist ideology, or even economic interest.

- "The median household income of a Trump voter so far in the primaries is about $72,000, based on estimates derived from [primary] exit polls and Census Bureau data. . . . well above the national median household income of about $56,000" (Silver 5-3-16).
- "White men went 63 percent for Trump versus 31 percent for Clinton, and white women went 53-43 percent. Among college-educated whites, only 39 percent of men and 51 percent of women voted for Clinton" (Sasson).

● "According to the Pew Research Center, eight in 10 white born-again, evangelical Christians say they voted for Trump compared to 16 percent for Clinton" (Agence France-Presse).

● About the Republican primary races, statistician Nate Silver observes,

> whereas Cruz offered a mix of anti-establishment-ism and movement conservatism — and whereas Marco Rubio offered movement conservatism plus a strong claim to electability — Trump's main differentiator was doubling down on cultural grievance: grievances against immigrants, against Muslims, against political correctness, against the media, and sometimes against black people and women. And the strategy worked. It's a point in favor of those who see politics as being governed by cultural identity — a matter of seeking out one's 'tribe' and fitting in with it — as opposed to carefully calibrating one's position on a left-right spectrum (5-4-16).

Five of Silver's six "cultural grievances" are more traditionally known as bigotry and discrimination, plain and simple.

Three years into President Trump's first term we see continued solid support for him from both the Tea Party middle class and working class people whose parents might have been Democrats. Some have never regained the incomes they lost in the Great Recession. But others are rich. Why do they seem so determined to pull down the temple?

For one thing, white guys are quite correct in assessing a *relative* economic decline: the prospects for middle class as well as working class families are the worst in generations. For decades Democrat and Republican politicians have faithfully helped their masters evade taxes, export jobs, loot public lands and the financial system, crush small retail and turn the skilled industrial labor force into part-time fast food workers. For many folks, in cities and small towns, growing income inequality has pushed the costs of land and housing ever further out of reach.

The new regime especially threatens men with few years in school, and the gender privilege that has been their last toehold in the middle class. There are fewer entry-level positions for people with less than extensive technical skills, and the local networks --your uncle or your classmate's dad-- have many fewer jobs to fill. Rural people used to be able to get by with strong networks, public assistance, access to public lands, low housing costs and relatively little cash; now many have been priced out of their communities. But even for tech-savvy young people just out of college the prospects are very uncertain. Skills that take a decade to learn can swiftly obsolesce. (I wonder too whether the years spent acquiring highly specialized skills makes some new-tech workers social idiots, poorly equipped for community and citizenship.) Robots and online Indians can do most anything our new grads can do, and many are burdened with much higher school debt than earlier generations. So while most white families are still better off than people of color, many see only a downward slide for the future (Appelbaum et al).

We should note that President Trump's most intense support comes from the nation's whitest counties, so it's clear that their bitter racism has little to do with crime or economic competition from immigrants and other people of color. (They might fear these things but that fear is not the cause but the result of racism. As always, racism is primarily a weapon against opponents within our own groups-- either they join my attacks on outsiders, under my generalship, or they risk becoming outsiders themselves.) (Bennhold writes that this phenomenon of racism floating free from economic competition shows up in Europe as well.)

In a few sectors immigrants displaced U.S.-born workers decades ago, but in fact it's low wages in demanding and dangerous jobs like farmwork and meat-packing that drove folks away who had any choice at all. Now employers complain they can't get U.S. born workers to fill these jobs; even when employers raise wages, it takes a long time for local people to develop the skills. For the economy as a whole, plenty of research indicates immigrants add jobs and markets. Baby boomers in particular should be concerned about attacks on immigrants. Increased immigration is our only chance to restore the healthy worker/retiree ratio that can sustain Social Security. But the folks who are thrilled to shred their own health insurance programs seem likewise pleased to keep new workers out of their communities.

Environmental pressures.

Already an aging population and decades of disinvestment strain our crumbling infrastructure; add to that climate change and, very soon, large scale cyberattacks. We'll see more situations like Flint MI, where the Republican governor took over a bankrupt town and, to save money, chose a polluting source of water. Bankrupt Puerto Rico will take years to rebuild from Hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017. Storm-scoured Texans will be drinking spilled petrochemicals for years, and we'll all pay for their cancers and miscarriages.

Conflicts over paying the costs of disasters and displacements will only intensify with climate change. After Hurricane Sandy raked the Northeast, Texas Senator Ted Cruz opposed federal aid for Yankees, then demanded billions to help Texans clean up after Harvey. (Clintonites display much the same attitude toward trade-ravaged blue collar communities: Not my problem.) What are we going to do with the tens of millions of climate refugees in coming decades?

All these trends and pressures add up to a sharp divide between the winners and losers in our increasingly winner-take-all global economy.

Eroding social structure.

Where I live it's a challenge to find institutional space where professionals, business people and working class folks can routinely interact. When the Clintonites of both parties purged factory workers and family farms from our nation's economy, we threw away communities of shared experience and values, so there are few obvious places for professional-class politicals to interface directly with blue- and pink-collar folks on anything more than a very small scale. Working- and professional-class people tend to live in different neighborhoods and go to different churches, if they go to church. Given the differences of ideology and experience, it's a daunting task to engage each other with trust, respect and determination; without some social and physical common ground, it's well-nigh impossible.

The folks who supported President Trump remain lightly organized, through churches, fraternal organizations, Chambers of Commerce and the remnants of labor unions. I say lightly because in many cases a few pastors, staffers or core activists claim to represent a much larger, not very committed membership. These gatekeepers, when not already betrothed to racism and the rich, are wary of giving leftish activists access to their members, because they fear revolts. Social services are another set of sites where people congregate, but managers running housing or food assistance or health insurance enrollment programs risk losing their funding if they let anyone talk

about policy. On the other hand, they can't stop us from hanging out on the sidewalks in front of their agencies.

Union "corporate" campaigns often recruit churches and community organizations in support of efforts like Fight for 15, the campaign to raise the minimum wage, but having professors and fast-food workers shouting slogans together on street corners a couple times a year is no foundation for understanding or lasting relationships. Some unions have strong education programs, and can mobilize their members for this work, but others make only token efforts. And as we have become all too painfully aware, the great age of telecomm has brought us mostly intensified segregation into sealed intellectual enclaves.

The 2008 financial meltdown accelerated the long-term erosion of local networks. The family, neighborhood and institutional relationships sundered when people lose their jobs and homes don't magically reconstitute when the GNP starts climbing again. Many men and women did eventually find jobs again, usually at lower wages, but the bankers can't give them back those lost months or years, or repair the families and communities torn apart by the disaster. Meanwhile relentless GOP attacks on the social safety net make it ever more difficult to heal the wounds of their reckless economic policies.

Just as consequential, the very wealthy no longer need the "local notables" who now make up the core of the Tea Party. Once these "lords of the local car dealership, country club and chamber of commerce" (Lind) were the indispensable pillars of national politics and economic policy, supporting the national elites on the foundation of the grassroots voters they could influence. And when working families needed help, there were local leaders they could go to.

Now small-town bigshots still rule what's left of their globalization-blasted communities, but they've largely been cut out of the national and transnational power structure. Remember Clinton I's famous "triangulation"?-- by which he hoped to rule free of the need to organize coalitions to move his agenda. The 2016 U.S. presidential election merely extended the established trend of bypassing state and local elites and party organizations in favor of campaigning by TV and social media.

As for Congress, the billionaires still need it to shield them from taxes and regulation, but they can easily elect, depose or buy off the majority. They fund entire state legislative agendas through countrywide operations like American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), in order to strangle or privatize public services. Their legislatures have gerrymandered electoral districts so that serious competition between the major parties is rare indeed. Where I live the half-century reign of the Representatives Duncan, father and son, began long before the Koch Brothers bought up the GOP. The Duncans ran a well-oiled retail favors machine feeding a long trail of clients. I don't know how much negotiating they had to do with local power brokers. In any case, what we see now is that state and local parties and the grassroots networks that sustain them have much less to offer the big players, and in consequence have much less trickle-down-your-leg to share among their local followers.

The Tea Party movement expresses the rage of these once powerful, now pathetic and self-mutilating Lears. Their champions campaign on ever more brazen and brutal racist policies, but beating up people of color is their method, not their main goal. Rather, they imagine that gutting our government will somehow put the faltering local business class back in charge of the economy

and culture. They pose no challenge to the investors' regime; indeed, they are beholden to it for the cash for their campaigns and media.

Meanwhile, rather than stick by the ones that brung 'em, the Davos crowd focus instead on making life sweet for oligarchs, oligopolists, money launderers and tax evaders. Have shell corporation Will travel! The flows of obligation and influence have been disrupted up and down the line.

Diminished role and purpose.

To highlight the recession under Bush I, Clinton strategist James Carville famously instructed us, It's "the economy, stupid". We vote our interests, near as we can figure them. But the economy is more than stuff.

A good job and access to services lets us take care of our families, contribute to the community, explore our capabilities and live with dignity. A lot of us have seen these capacities diminish, along with our sense of purpose and self-respect. Needless to say, status and wealth go hand in hand, reinforcing each other; but it's often threats to our status that we feel most keenly. What's the worst part of losing one's job? Hunger is bad, but your kids' hunger is worse. A parent might feel humiliated to have to beg help to feed her kids, especially if up to now she has prided herself on fierce independence, and scorned needy neighbors. It's no wonder that the most economically depressed communities also suffer high rates of addiction, suicide, and a hundred more indicators of neglect and despair.

The self-respect component of economic well-being is, by the way, one reason the usual Democrat grab-bag of promises of material goodies --here's a crumb for you, and one for you-- just does not cut it. "We bring more than a paycheck to our loved ones and families," Sweet Honey sang, but the favor-traders and their bean counters tend to forget this.

Men who rely too much on macho values have had a steeper slide than most. Some fellers spend years huffing and puffing to establish reps as tough guys, stand-up guys, always take care of their own, never back down, men of honor, forces to be reckoned with, and realize after a lifetime of painful posturing that nobody gives a damn. Their communities have passed them by. They haven't won any wars lately, and can no longer claim an indispensable role as breadwinners for the family. Faludi thinks the big loss has been men's sense of purpose, usefulness, contribution to the community. Some women have been similarly stranded. Traditional values attract more sieg heils these days and fewer poets.

When presidential candidate Romney characterizes half of us as dependent, spoiled, self-described victims claiming unearned entitlement to health care, food, housing, "you-name-it" --all those benefits only millionaires deserve-- or when candidate Clinton calls one quarter of voters "deplorables", we know exactly what rich people think of working class people. And I suspect the certainty that we know better what's good for You People than you do yourselves is not my personal failing alone.

Recently a Dcrat Congresswoman said that people respond to President Trump because, unlike liberals, he does not hector them and talk down to them (Alberta 11-13-20). I find this explanation incomplete. I have never heard my professional-class compatriots speak with more scorn for working class and rural white people than the President's fans among them express for us, so the

disrespect goes both ways, and not necessarily equally. Yuppies have every reason to fear the criminal Right --the COVID plague adds one more-- and may turn fear into bigotry as easily as our non-yup neighbors.

One possible difference: by education and experience, professional-class folks tend not to embrace prejudice, but hide it, and sometimes resist it, however lazily and incompletely. We know discriminating against groups based on lies and stereotypes is stupid and self-indulgent and harms the whole community. We know such dishonest thinking gets in our own way as we try to live our lives because it drives us away from solving problems into making our problems worse. We feel ashamed when we stoop so low.

Understandable, though, when rightists see as hypocrisy professional-class attention to race and gender justice, while sometimes closing our eyes to class and regional disparities.

Whereas many if not all of the millions who embrace President Trump embrace hatred and prejudice as well. How often do people say of this compulsive liar: I like the way he talks frankly and honestly. He doesn't pussyfoot around. And it's true, the President is very clear. We need only listen to what he focusses on in his speeches. It's undeniable: hatred and prejudice form the core of his appeal. He gives us permission to give way to our worst impulses. We don't have to constantly check ourselves and second-guess our reactions and try to see things from our neighbors' perspectives.

Perhaps most appealing is the President's shameless cynicism. He does not try to hide his selfishness, and his working assumption that we are all as selfish as himself. It's the core value of Pesident Trump's transactional approach to every relationship. Perhaps you have met a 12-year-old with a newfound contempt for their parents, confused and ashamed at the onset of puberty, and feeling helpless to do anything about it. Relentless cynicism and a rigidly narrow selfishness serve as armor to protect ourselves from constant disappointment. They simplify the world for us, and seem to lift us above our dilemmas. We give up trusting the neighbors, give up having to make choices, when all the choices seem terrible. Many of us find this very liberating.

This fact cannot justify do-gooders' dismissal of that half of the country, but does indicate the hurdles. Harris writes, "For four years, Democrats have been caught in what might be thought of as the contempt conundrum. The only principled response to Trump's shredding of norms and defiance of accountability is steadfast opposition. This, at times, can goad them into the same politics of insult and indignation in which Trump thrives." Perfectly natural, and disastrous; an emotional luxury we cannot afford. If we cannot separate the President from his supporters, he has won, whatever the electoral results.

I wonder too how much the widespread sense of being disrespected arises from folks accepting the standards of the elites who despise them. I've seen myself how judgmental folks can be about their peers, including the criticisms folks getting government assistance level at others in the same programs. In *Hillbilly Elegy,* J.D. Vance describes the anger many people feel about their jobless neighbors for living off the dole, buying fancy shoes or electronics that those of us with kids to feed and houses to fix cannot afford, even as he recognizes how much he and they have in common. "We began to view much of our fellow working class with mistrust" (p.139).* When we

* When Vance's book first came out, I saw a lot of generic attacks on the guy for being a right-wing corporado, which he is (is there any other kind?), with little evidence the critics had actually read the book. I find it remarkable that

don't like ourselves it's easy to think no one else does either. Churches, mesjids and synagogues make sure we know the slackers and sinners offend God Himself, and very deliberately amplify both our sense of failure and our disdain for others' shortfalls. Along the way, they assure us that professional class liberals on the other side of the desk at the social services office regard their clients with the same casual contempt.

Couple of things going on here, I think. First, no doubt some people --not nearly as many as we think-- do indeed make stupid choices, decisions about money and relationships that will squeeze their range of options in the future. (I used to think, Leave us be, we love ourselves and the world and we will take care of both. Now I think that love and caring may be natural impulses, but also require skills that have to be nurtured. We don't automatically know how best to care for ourselves and our communities, especially under the torrent of abuse by preachers and corporations.) For a grocery store clerk, as Vance was then, people who scam forty bucks from food assistance are a lot more visible than the corporados who squeeze family farmers, underpay farmworkers, plunder public lands or poison crops with pesticides, whilst pocketing billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies.

Second, I don't like it when some people take advantage of the system, taking way more than they need and contributing far less than they're able. (I myself have got the sums exactly right.) It hurts all of us, especially those who need help the most. But what else can we expect of a system where most big decisions are taken by a few people, who also just happen to pocket most of the benefits? The rest of us feel little ownership. If we want our neighbors to take more responsibility we've got to make space for them to share in key decisions.

Third, when I see low income people buying things I consider useless or extravagant, maybe even going into debt for them, often I can read that as no more than the status-seeking behavior the rest of us act out with bigger toys like pick-up trucks, graduate degrees and cosmetic surgery. Who does not want to show off her prosperity, even if the display hides an impoverished reality? Who does not want to be in a position to give gifts, large or small, to family and friends, or do our part to keep up the church? Scott writes about how important it is to our standing in the community to be able to maintain exchange relationships and contribute to community rituals (1976 p.176).

Every one of us seeks status and respect. Folks with little money and few skills can at least buy fancy shoes and phones, and steaks for the baby mama. We feel better as providers, rather than just another nameless scrounger among thousands.

Violence, too, is an instrument of status, for those who have few others. When we feel we have so little to be proud of, so little control over our lives, and so little to lose, some of us are quick to attack others for real or perceived disrespect. We are especially likely to respond with violence when we have been abused as children, when we have been brought up by violent parents-- just as abusive military systems promote atrocities. As we know, the targets of our rage are far more

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some academics who criticize others for misrepresenting Appalachia, launch exactly the same attacks on a person who grew up among Appalachian kin, because they don't like his version of events. Can you imagine these professors denying the personal stories of people from other ethnic groups? We don't have to draw the same conclusions Vance does, but we would be wise to listen to folks' stories even when they do not exactly fit our notion of how the world should behave.

likely to be women, or or gay people, or immigrants, or people of color, rather than people in power. Kick the dog, or your partner-- don't you like yourself more now? And violence is a social pleasure. Teens join gangs, college boys join the Nazis-- where else can they shine? Otherwise no one's going to appreciate their outsize personality, their artistic bent, their fondness for screen games.

Fourth, it's much easier for upper middle class people to see the benefits from our thrifty, hardworking, responsible ways; our investments in housing, health and education pay off fairly reliably over decades. (Calculations may change drastically for young people just now entering the robot economy.) For folks who have worked and sacrificed for years and still can't seem to get ahead, who have little margin to cope with sudden illness or unemployment, the careless and apparently carefree attitude of some low income people must seem like a slap in the face; a challenge to our notions of the just rewards to virtue and vice. " . . . as one man put it, government was 'payin' people who are on welfare today doin' nothin'! They're laughing at our society! And we're all hardworkin' people and we're gettin' laughed at for workin' every day" (Vance 140). But of course most people on the edge aren't laughing at all. They're trying to keep their heads high, like they deserve to be treated with respect.

Fifth --probably not finally-- it's totally understandable that people at the edge try hard to distinguish themselves from others they consider to have fallen out of decent society. When we're near the bottom we like to remind our bosses how much better we are than the people below us. The social scientists even have a name for it: last-place aversion. How it manifests, according to some researchers, is that

> some poor people may be vociferously opposed to the kinds of policies that would actually raise their own income a bit but that might also push those who are poorer than them into comparable or higher positions. . . . Those not at risk of becoming the poorest did not seem to mind falling a notch in the distribution of income nearly as much. This idea is backed up by survey data from America collected by Pew, a polling company: those who earned just a bit more than the minimum wage were the most resistant to increasing it (*Economist* 8-13-11).

Other studies specifically link inter-group competition to opposition to social programs, even those that could directly help the participants.

> We showed them graphs of whites' and minorities' income trends — and these were made up. But in the racial threat condition, we showed them [also fabricated data] that whites' incomes were declining.
>
> So I would think, rationally, that you should want to support programs that benefit whites in this condition, right? But we didn't find that. We didn't find that they wanted to support programs that benefit whites when whites' incomes are declining. Instead, we found they wanted to cut programs that they perceived as benefiting minorities.
>
> That is sort of contradictory to me. Can you break that down?
>
> The way that we understood this is that those perceptions [that] whites' income advantage were declining were perceived as a threat to white

> status and this status threat increased their feelings of resentment of minorities.
>
> So, it was less a rational response to incomes declining, "How can we help people whose incomes are declining?" And more about, "This is a feeling that the status position that I've become accustomed to is slipping away." And that increases resentment of minorities, and so, it's a more emotional response that leads them to want to cut welfare programs to help the poor (Chow 6-8-18).

This is not a new discovery. Nearly two centuries ago Marx described the fear of the lower middle class that they would fall into the ranks of the working class or landless laborers, and how that derailed any chance of a united front against the parasites at the top.

I had a chance to talk one time with a Fed Ex driver, as we watched the Fight for 15 folks demonstrate for raising the minimum wage. This fellow didn't like the idea at all: fast food is work for kids, who don't need much money. If fast food workers don't like the wages, they should get a better job. That's what this driver did. After working at MacDonalds, he got a job with the military, and then another, and when we talked he was delivering office supplies for $8.75-- not enough for his working wife and 2 kids, he admitted. But it just isn't fair for fast food workers (so many of them women) to make more than he does, or --if the minimum wage rises for everyone-- even to make the same. "An EMT giving CPR to a sick person," he told me, "that's worth a lot more than someone flipping burgers." In this instance, defending the status quo means literally defending status.

Appelbaum describes a very similar response by a Trump fan in Minnesota, speaking about his partner. She "spent eight years climbing up to her current pay grade, he said, and it wouldn't be fair for workers who have just joined Walmart to be lifted to the same level." Given his conviction that helping other working families is unfair, it's relevant that the man himself lives off federal disability payments. As much as we hunger to fill our bellies, we also hunger to have someone to look down on-- perhaps in direct proportion to the belly kind of hunger.

The parts professionals play. These are the people whose main income derives from renting out expensively acquired knowledge and skills, and whose workplace hazards run more to white-collar crime than carpal tunnel syndrome, pesticide poisoning, mine collapses or falling into giant meatgrinders. In that some professionals have quite a bit of discretion in setting our own schedules, working conditions, and even goals, responsibilities and performance standards, we act more like owners than employees. (For the most part schoolteachers and non-MD health care workers do not fall into this privileged category.) We colonize a tremendous range of habitats, from rural schoolrooms to 2-person accounting firms at the far end of half-empty shopping malls, to corner offices in transnational corporations and the federal government. Our political commitments are just as diverse. We play important though not decisive roles in backlash politics, variously colluding with the corporados, building alliances with working families, or simply ignoring small business and the working class, sometimes with a tinge of contempt.

In part professionals are important because of our positions in the bureacracies implementing billionaires' policies. Professionals also make policy on the fringes where the billionaires don't

care, but the rest of us do, as with social services. When we mess up, as with the unforgiveably incompetent rollout of the ACA health insurance system, we can harm millions-- and sabotage the whole idea of honest, competent public service. The Tea Party could not have designed a more effective argument against democratic government than Obama's mismanagement of Obamacare.

When we're not busy ignoring middle and working class folks, we tend to take a patronizing attitude that we know what's best for them, and dismiss their complaints as mere ignorance. Indeed, that has been the Obamanid strategy all along, very explicitly, with health care-- don't bother to explain, ignore the concerns, because eventually folks will realize the ACA is good for them. And this eventually did happen to some extent-- after the GOP slammed a slew of torpedoes into the badly listing program. The same thinking went into NAFTA and the other trade deals, but a quarter century on no one's looking back with newfound appreciation.

The charge of "political correctness" is mainly a cover for contempt for women and people of color, but there's real fury behind it. When we make policy that's going to affect a lot of people, many of us find it easy to lapse into a hectoring, schoolmarmish posture that You all have it wrong; that We know better, by virtue of our years on the grad school chain gang. Sometimes all we can truthfully claim is that we know different.

It's a big deal, too, that professional-class people have largely displaced union workers as the engine of the Democratic Party, especially since the rule changes after the disastrous 1968 convention. Those changes helped correct the serious underrepresentation of women and people of color. Nevertheless, "The McGovern Commission reforms seemed to be populist, but their effect was to replace one group of party insiders with another—in this case, to replace leaders of workers' organizations with affluent professionals" (Thomas Frank, cited in Packer). Pacewicz says the rise of the yups blurred the lines between parties, because party identity drifted loose from class. We see how that's worked out-- the Ds are so much stronger now than during the New Deal. Dcrats marvel that some low income folks don't see the threat posed by President Trump and his fellow billionaires, while averting their eyes from the deep and ugly corruption among their own leadership, poorly concealed under a veneer of liberalism, but apparently well enough for yups young and old.

(After the 2016 electoral disaster, we heard calls for a new reform of Democrat Party structure, especially with respect to superdelegates. Perhaps the next set of winners will not be so eager to invite the losers to join the opposition.)

This segment of the professional class sought to remake world in its own image-- an economy without manufacturing and manufacturing workers, the final triumph of suburbia over smokestacks. Do you remember? Outsourcing industry is inevitable, they told us, and did their best to grease the skids. Instead, we'll all prosper designing screen games or U-toob content. How many of these clean-cut, gym-going, Sierra Club donating, 2.5 kids producing, middle class, middle of the road, moderately stoned, radically ignorant economists asked what was happening to all those laid-off factory workers? Few could be bothered to interrupt their song of praise for growing GDP-- a measure akin to judging students by how often they sharpen their pencils. Losing your job is a small price to pay, they told us, for the privilege of being able to buy China-made plastic at the local dollar store.

As early as the 1980s, "Instead of speaking for the working class, the Clintons spoke about equipping workers to rise into the professional class," (Packer), and of course they weren't alone.

This has been the mantra of all the tech and free trade missionaries, a way to stifle their consciences as millions lost their jobs. Right. Job training classes will turn millions of middle-aged miners and machinists into successful engineers and entrepreneurs. Abandon your community and head to some row of cubicles on the coast, you'll be just like us in no time-- a prescription very analogous to the way some white people express how very happy we are to accept black people, so long as they act white. All of it utter nonsense, of course, as the proselytizers themselves will find out when they get notice from the AIs who replace them. I've read that's right around the corner. I'll probably live to see it and give a big laugh. Already bots are writing news stories and spreading Putin propaganda, and we can't tell they are not people. (Is that because the bots have become more like us, or the other way 'round?)

Our absolutely justified concerns about how industry poisons the environment take on a similar element of fantasy when we expect we can continue our high consumption path without sacrifice, by shoving the burden onto the working class and onto low income nations. True, along with much of the manufacturing base, the U.S. has exported a good part of our pollution to China; too bad for us the pollution doesn't stay there. Now rich Chinese are trying to catch up with U.S. overconsumption, gobbling everything from rhino horns to the forests of Southeast Asia and the Americas. No worries; the Supreme Court has just approved President Trump's ban on rising seas.

One excellent outcome of the ascendancy of the professionals has been to expand the fights for a sustainable economy and against race and gender discrimination. What hasn't been so great is the extent to which we've lost sight of other corruptions. To some degree this may derive from the nature of the rightist assault. The corporation-white Christian coalition attacks women, gay people and people of color for who they are, while bulldozing employees, young people, old people, and people who like to breathe air, mainly because they're in the way. Left activists often denounce racism and gay-baiting as divide-and-rule, but because in-the-way white people are not so often demonized per se, time and again white leftists let themselves be divided and diverted, effectively forgetting that in defending GLBTQ people and people of color, they also defend the political freedom and economic agency of white men and women, including themselves. Victim-seeking, noblesse oblige do-gooderism damns us to division.

Finally a few politicians had to resign after assaulting women. Now if only we could force resignations from politicians employed by Goldman Sachs. Despite banana-republic levels of inequality and the continued threat of another global crash like that of 2008, we never institutionalized Occupy Wall Street. We made few policy changes. Some of us chuckled at those crazy kids who thought there's something not quite right with bosses making 400 times their employees' wages. Sure, we admire idealists, but get real!

I used to think politicians gave up talking about poverty because they figured the middle class had no generosity left; now it seems just as likely that we figured low income people don't take part in politics, so why bother paying attention to their problems? Turns out, though, some low income black and white people do vote after all.

Or maybe poverty is so remote to yups we don't even notice. Didn't LBJ abolish poor people in 1965? Despite many women writing about the braided causes and effects of race, gender and class divisions, many professional-class people see dealing with race and gender as much more urgent than class-- to the extent that they still celebrate a candidate who made her career by hitching a

ride on the feminist movement even while amassing over a hundred million dollars from dictators and bankers, payoffs for services rendered.

Insofar as the yups see working class and the non-professional middle class as the stronghold of racism and sexism --the "deplorables"-- college boys never rape people or spraypaint racist epithets on dorm walls, doncha know-- we figure, we don't owe them nothing. Stupid! Criminally stupid. As if we can build a democracy without two-thirds of the population.

Professional-class bias may actually increase as cracks appear in the corporation-white Christian coalition. I'm glad a few CEOs threaten to disinvest from states like North Carolina with brutally sexist policies. But we follow the Clintonite leap over the cliff when we start feeling all warm and cozy about the corporations. Welcoming gay customers can never excuse the investor types for cheating employees (here or overseas), corrupting our government or poisoning our air and water.

Whatever the relative contribution of all these factors, what's clear is that, as much as by the *progressive* loss of their race and gender privilege, many white men and women are strongly motivated by sheer loathing of the professional class who seem to be behind it all. Class war is alive and well, and it's not the 99%, or the idea of the 99%, that's winning.

Contrasting options, loyalties and ways to deal. Even with better intentions than we've shown, cross-class work can never be easy. For one thing, prejudice runs both ways. I know people who were working on trade and outsourcing issues thirty years ago, while our current master was still losing his first billion dollars. Some of these same folks have also worked for decades with unions, rural groups and communities of color to fight back against polluters who poison workplaces and communities. Yet they've been lumped in with the Clintonites as elitists. This is one label racists and sexists attach to people who are less so.

Beyond the barriers of mutual suspicion, people in different classes tend to have different associations, loyalties and ways of dealing with problems, based in part on the different range of choices we face. Generalizations are always incomplete, at best, but it helps to take these variations into account as we try to engage our neighbors.

Not much mystery about our different positions in the economy. Here let me write a few words about loyalties, because politics is so much a function of the groups with which we identify.

One of the many things I like about living in Tennessee is the fond way people talk about the colorful characters in their communities. It comes from knowing people over many years, people connected to a place. These stories also reflect the expectations, surprises, delights and conflicts that arise in any community where people depend on each other for all sorts of material and emotional help. This kind of storytelling may be a dying art, as small town networks fray and we spend more time licking our screens.

Me, I grew up a long way from where I live now. I came here for a job, but I would have gone almost anywhere. I keep in touch with friends from the old neighborhood, but they know nothing about the folks I deal with now. As a teacher I admired my colleagues but I was pretty much on my own all day in the classroom, and 3 or 4 hours more doing homework at night. Since I retired I depend less on my neighbors than on my pension. I inherit no generations-old relationships with local shopowners; mostly I just scan the screen for the cheapest price. I've heard some moving testimony at funerals but rarely the kind of daily pointed teasing and gossip common in other

circles-- being less dependent on each other, maybe middle class professionals don't need so much these instruments of social control.

Missing these elements, I think a lot of professional class people don't feel that kind of identification with a community-in-place that is so central to the way many small-town or old-neighborhood folks see themselves. So folks who expect the signifiers of reflexive particularist loyalties --flags and fanny-patting, team colors, high-fives, bullying, scapegoating and ostracism, especially when directed against outsiders such as gay people, people of color or non-Christians -- will be disappointed with people like me.

Of course, the world-wide fascist movement, organized online and fed by a steady flood of lies and vitriol from blood-drenched dictators and contemptuous media billionaires, cannot itself be said to expess the simple love of community, however much the Nazis justify their calls for rape and murder as merely defending hearth and home, the Little Woman and the persecuted master race.

If Metzgar is right about the difference between working class and professional class ways of knowing (2012), this would also shape our politics. I know how easy it is for us to deceive ourselves, and I tend to trust procedures designed to overcome sensory limitations and minimize personal bias. Metzgar sees the advantage to these but also thinks that following the procedures gives us a false sense of certainty. His blue collar folks tend to modest about their claims or comments, often with qualifiers like "by my lights" that recognize that reality is bigger than we can understand, that others might have different perspectives, and implicitly invite an exchange of views.

I see also variations in behavior that may owe as much to personality as to class, but may nevertheless pertain here. People like me think of life more as a series of strategic rather than moral choices, and when I fail, I feel foolish and embarrassed rather than sinful. I look for a way around. I tend to try to navigate more than endure, adapt rather than control.

Above I wrote a bit about our sense of agency. In this context it seems that control-oriented people feel as if they have more power to influence the people and institutions around them. I don't expect other people to see things the way I do. I feel that I can influence them to some extent, but see myself also as subject to change, emotionally and physically manipulable to some extent like the rest of my environment. I figure change is inevitable, and try to anticipate and prepare for and steer it, even as I arm myself to resist the changes I don't like. I don't mind pushing other people around, but I feel the heavy costs waste my time and drag me down; keep me from moving toward my goals. Most of us value strong relationships. In addition, I depend on agility as much as walls to protect me.

Most churches reinforce the endure and control mindset, in keeping with the idea that the reality we ought to attend to is an unchanging truth. When more and less authoritarian people look for common ground, we might keep in mind these very different ways of approaching problems.

Tell the truth! If this recent outbreak of protofascism tells us anything --and I don't mean just the 2016 gangsters but the decades and centuries of systematic lying that gave them birth-- it is that the truth matters. Democracy works only when we can talk about real problems and solutions,

when reality is our touchstone. That's the only thing we have in common, but it's a big thing-- when we value it.

The gangsters spin lies big and small, some of which they want us to believe, some simply to confuse us, so that we lose confidence in institutions like the media and the courts, and our own ability to make sense of experience. President Trump's spokeswoman calls her lies "alternative facts", and his lawyer says "Truth isn't truth." They say that stuff. It's no wonder so many of us fall for the lies of Rupert Murdoch, Vladimir Putin and countless televangelists: we have been trained from birth to accept the most preposterous make-believe as true, to obey self-serving liars, and to give ourselves over to self-appointed saviors. Often times the Ruperts don't care whether we believe them, so long as we can't trust anyone else, either. Their main goal in all this is to keep us divided and demoralized, and too often they succeed.

Rightists must lie to hold onto power, but some small-d democrats have gotten awfully comfortable with pleasant fantasies, self-serving evasions, exclusive jargon and slogans drained of content. Way too often, for the sake of the big tent, we accept unsubstantiated and even absurd claims and give them as much weight as statements verified by multiple independent sources. In 2019 I heard Dcrat candidates dismissing questions about their programs as Republican talking points-- as if that will silence voters who would actually like to hear the answers. One leftish Congresswoman says it's more important to be morally right than to tell the truth (Blake 1-7-19). What better way to solve real problems than to ignore reality itself? Makes it tough, though, to hold accountable the liars in power --those peerless traffickers in morality!-- or to engage meaningfully with our neighbors.

Even more common, we bandy about arcane grad-school terms that we don't bother to explain to folks who didn't have seven or eight years to spend in the ivory towers. Rightists too can invent words with lots of syllables; doesn't mean they have any relation to reality.

Credibility is a precious resource, hard to earn and easy to piss away. To me, the main point of being consistently truthful is so that our neighbors will listen even when we say things they don't want to hear. But we can lose that strength by carelessness and laziness.

And our cozy little enthusiasms and self-flatteries can bloom into bigger lies. Want to know how it could be that so many still support the traitor who became U.S. president? Ask those Western do-gooders of the 1930s, who saw in Stalin's mass murders only the working class paradise of their dreams.

Want to reclaim democracy? Insist first of all on telling the truth. It's the first source of democratic power. Tell the truth! And when we're not sure, say that, too.

Start by being honest about our own agenda.

When we do reach out across the boundaries, so often white professional-class activists approach blue- and pink-collar folks and people of color as if we were doing them a great favor; as if our project were charity rather than self-defense. We don't have to say it out loud for our targets to hear, You're the ones with the problems; we have come to lift you up. And we're dead wrong when middle-class professionals judge blue- and pink-collar folks to be inherently less interested in justice than we claim to be ourselves.

Professional-class politicals have to be much more diligent about talking about our own self-interest. Lots of people work hard to bring a measure of justice to our communities, at some expense and risk to themselves, but so often the work is couched in terms of helping the downtrodden. The targets of such largesse are totally right to look suspiciously on the extended hand, whether it's missionaries handing out God and groceries or politicals offering Empowerment (as if that is something someone can grant).

What's in it for you? We'd ask this even if ours were not by ideology one of the most competitive, dog-eat-dog societies on earth. And the small-d democrats better have more to say than "justice". What does that mean? I can think of a bunch of ways my life would be better if we had a more democratic society. I know people with different resources and education would benefit too, but not necessarily the same way.

To me, the first requirement of coalition work is to recognize the differences among partners and prospective partners. The second is to be honest about them. We share plenty of values and goals, but we've got to identify and not just assume them.

And please, let's absolutely flush this self-serving pretense that the only proper role for white professional-class activists is to hold the slippers for the low income people and people of color who will lead the revolution. The rationale is that the more vulnerable folks are presumably more motivated to push for radical change. This posture is dishonest and dangerous, a way to avoid accountability and a recipe for corruption.

Deceitful, because we gringos get to choose who are the true revolutionaries we claim to follow-- or as is perhaps the more usual case, we put up our own candidates, diamonds in the rough that we have polished to our liking. Self-deluding, too, to pretend that professional-class people are or ever can be selfless servants of The Masses.

Fact is, even in Iran and the U.S.A, lawyers and doctors and professors always have an important albeit subordinate political role. Second, we do have a material stake in the outcome of this work, and it's not exactly the same as what's important to working class people or farmers or people with small businesses. For one thing, the Ph.D.s and law degrees would be the first in line for jobs with a more service-oriented government.

I understand the commitment to step back arose from good intent, decades ago, as a way to make room for other voices. Hopefully we are more practiced now at paying attention and responding usefully. I hope we've learned to curb the habit of speaking for other people. But the "Just tell me what to do" posture of some professional-class activists has served more to cover up the problem than to fix it. Putting a couple blue- and pink-collar folks on our boards and brochures cannot disguise the professional class dominance in many organizations, and romanticizing people pushed to the margins can be just as condescending as seeing only inferiority. Some labor unions train members to staff their programs, rather than hire people right out of college with no labor experience. We can also seek out and partner with the democratic groups, sometimes quite informal, that have always (although not everywhere) arisen in working class communities and among people of color.

We recognize that folks with less gender, race and class privilege take much bigger risks and many more casualties. They have first hand experience the more comfortable among us need to

learn from. Some policies they demand are quite different from what thrills the white-collar crowd, and if we want their help we better attend to their priorities.

We respect their needs and experience. We should quit trying to conceal our own. We choose. Every one of us acts in her own interest, and it just sows a lot of confusion, distrust and inevitable disappointment to pretend otherwise.

**** Delve deeper, get the details.**

When we hear people make claims we know to be untrue, we can dispute them, respectfully, or question the sources. Makes no sense, though, to contradict folks' description of their own experience. First, unless we were there with them at the time, we have no way to know that what they tell us is not true. We lie sometimes, especially if we have backed ourselves into a corner, but most of us prefer to tell the truth. Second, and more important, as initiators, we ourselves need to be open to new information, and we want to model that openness for others.

Rather than dismiss someone else's dubious story, we can ask for more details. Sometimes it turns out to much richer than the short-hand version they retail to the rest of us, and not so dependent on the slogans that rule our understanding.

Earl Swift writes about the people who live on Tangier Island in Chesapeake Bay. Little by little their island is eroding away. Lots of them reject the idea that rising seas and climate change have anything to do with this existential threat. They figure erosion has been going on forever, and if the government would just build a wall around their island, they'd be all set.

Most of them are religious, and supporters of President Trump. As with the rest of us, no doubt their politics colors their interpretations. Shall we just dismiss such folks as incorrigibly wrong-headed? What would bring them to admit the fact of climate change before their homes wash into the bay? And why would we care?

I'll answer this last question first: I want people to tell the truth so that we don't blame our woes on gay people, women, people of color, faceless bureaucrats, pointy-head professors, Muslims or "Washington", and thereby let the real culprits literally get away with murder.

Swift writes that the Tangier residents by and large just do not see evidence of sea-level rise. They make their living gathering crabs from the bay, and they trust their own observations a lot more than some outsider scientists'. At one point Tangier's mayor shared a TV show with Anderson Cooper and Al Gore. He said, "Vice President Gore, Mr. Cooper, I'm a commercial crabber, and I've been working the Chesapeake Bay for 50-plus years . . . . I'm not a scientist, but I'm a keen observer, and if sea-level rise is occurring, why am I not seeing signs of it?" Gore replied that scientists do expect a rise in the sea-level, and then makes a joke, but does not directly answer the mayor's question.

Swift suggests Gore could have talked about the difficulties of noticing changes that happen in such a gradual, incremental manner. Maybe Gore could have mentioned climate-related changes elsewhere. He could have asked, How about the weather, and the crabs? Or is everything the same as it was thirty or forty years ago? He could ask, How do you think the scientists measure sea-level rise, anyhow? and, What evidence would you accept, and how would you go about gathering it?

I suspect that the islanders will stick to their story even when they have to leave. For them there is no good solution. There is no foreseeable fix that will save their homes from this worldwide accelerating trend. As unlikely as it is that the rest of the country will buy them a seawall, or that the seawall would work, or that building it wouldn't destroy the wildlife these folks depend on, that's still a better bet than the chances that our gangster overlords will spend a dollar of their stolen profits to curb climate change.

In other situations, I've seen that folks will reexamine their experience and come to new conclusions. Here I'll draw on my notes from a GED class I taught.

In response to the essay question, Why do kids drop out of school? one teen in my GED class wrote: drug addiction. Students get high so often they stop going to class? Come to find out this young woman had been suspended several times for smoking, fell behind her classmates, and quit coming back.

Another student chose the essay question about drug abuse, and wrote that we should jail all drug users. When asked to explain her thinking, she admitted that both she and her daughter took illegal drugs, and that jail wouldn't help them.

A young mom said homeless people are a bunch of low-lifes, begging money for drugs and liquor. I asked her how she knew how they spent money. Surprised, she said, That's what I did. But as we talked more, she said that in fact she saved her money to buy what she needed.

A woman recounted how much she liked her factory job and co-workers, until everything changed and she quit because of personal conflicts. When I asked for details, she finally explained that she'd been fired for clocking out a friend who'd left early. The co-worker had carpal tunnel syndrome, and the supervisor was looking for an excuse to fire the injured woman, and was happy to fire them both over the time card.

The preacher went on a tear about big government. I asked about his personal experience. His wife had a government job helping disabled kids-- government helped him, too, when he got laid off. His grandfather had black lung disease, and depended on union and government health care. He knew churches couldn't provide all the help people need.

It's surprisingly easy for us to recite slogans we've heard, even when they contradict our experience; even when they call on us to blame ourselves unfairly. Until I had these conversations I hadn't realized how common it is for marginalized people to accept the scornful assessment of themselves by the privileged. Folks I've talked with seem generally to welcome the invitation to revisit the dominant story in the light of their own experience. We may have to peel away some untruthful or half-truthful cover stories first-- very carefully.

**** Where did that come from? Explore the sources of our ideas and assumptions.**

> Faith had not learned how to use herself as an instrument of understanding. This requires self-knowledge, and Faith's teachers had offered her little opportunity for self-knowledge. Faith needed practice in constructing metaphorical extensions to span the distance between her own and others' experiences. She needed to learn to respect her own

> reactions, not as final truths but as starting points for understanding.
> --Belenky et al 122

> What we are calling passionate knowing is the elaborated form connected knowing takes after women learn to use the self as an instrument of understanding. In the earlier form of connected knowing . . . opening up to ideas or people is stressed as a procedure for knowing, but the relative lack of self-knowledge prevents women from finding points of connection between what they are trying to understand and their own experience.
> --Belenky et al 141

In the teaching business, metacognition refers to awareness of how we learn something. We want students to know not just that 12/6 + 14/7 = 4, but how they got that answer; we want them to understand the process as much as the result, because it's the process they'll use again and again. We want them to know the procedures for sounding out a new word and deriving its meaning from context. We want them to know how to judge the reliablity of data they come across online. We want them to think about what makes it easier and what makes it harder for them to remember information or grasp new ideas, or even to show up on time.

In this age of alternate facts and sealed information environments, it's important that we all reflect on how we come by our understandings of the world. One way to start might be to identify our standpoints-- literally our points of view. By way of illustration we might ask how old people and young people, rich and poor might have different ideas about public health programs. Then we could identify some things about our own situation that influence us to think in a certain way-- and suggest that folks in different circumstances might come to different conclusions. We all know at some level that our own is not the only valid opinion, but it helps to be reminded now and again.

And when folks make broad claims, whether we agree with them or not, we want to know the basis. Have you seen that? Where did you hear that? How do you know Mexicans are rapists? How do you know the GOP tax cut plan is going to hurt a lot of people? I remember a social services manager who complained about the liberal Supreme Court. We can add contrary information without arguing or being know-it-alls. Without being professorial, we can say, I saw this on . . . or, This happened to my cousin. It's good practice to specify our sources.

For example, the Enlightenment package.

I seem to have picked up along the way, quite unintentionally, elements of the Enlightenment package, among which I count:

• a method: We can demonstrate truths empirically, by observation of the world around us. We ask materialist questions and seek materialist answers. We acknowledge no authority beyond the truths we can demonstrate in the real world.

An important advantage of the materialist approach is that it gives us the best way to reach agreement short of bloodshed. Since we all share the same reality, we are bound to share many of the same experiences, challenges and understandings. Authoritarians, on the other hand, must

shore up their arbitrary, made-up ideologies by silencing dissent through beatings, arson, jail, torture, murder and war.

• some conclusions: We are products of our natural and social environment. From that, we conclude that we change behaviors by changing the environment. Want to reduce robbery and rape? Give hungry people more food and skills, and women more power.

This also means that none of us is born more or less virtuous or valuable than any other. Radical equality is not a sentiment or an ideal, it is an observable fact.

• optimism: We can therefore solve our problems. A very powerful part of this optimism is deTocqueville's notion of self-interest well-understood: our recognition that our own individual self-interest is bound up with the well-being of the community-- the "commonwealth". The Founders feared self-interest as the "spirit of faction" that would destroy the republic. Hobbesian authoritarians of previous generations said that only a dictator's iron fist could curb the "war of all against all" brought on by our unruly, insatiable irrational individual desires. So I find it interesting that both Adam Smith, 1776 theorist of capitalism, and deTocqueville, keen observer of 1830s USA, see in self-interest the great source of prosperity and community.

Authoritarians fear and despise people. Small-d democrats are in awe of our potential. We educate each other, not to eradicate our beastly natures, or make saints of sinners, or fashion the "new socialist man", but so that each of us can best fulfill our own potential.

I couldn't tell you which old dead white guys provided which pieces of this set of claims, assumptions and observations, except for a bit of deTocqueville, but I know that the USA too is a product of the Enlightenment, and most of the good things about this place.

What *has* been intentional in my life is testing the accuracy, or not, of this model of society. Sure, the nature vs. nurture debate continues, but we got centuries of data indicating that society and culture profoundly modify every gene-driven behavior, in part because our brains and bodies are so complex in the first place. We still often like the old labels "good," "evil" and so forth, but they are useless to understand, describe or change how we act. Likewise, labels of "rationalist" (rich white guys) vs. "irrational" everyone else ("hysterical" comes from a Greek root word meaning uterus) simply have no basis in observed reality. And despite our easy recourse to scare talk about "woke mobs" and the like, in fact there's plenty of data too that collective action, even when relatively spontaneous, can be well-organized, purposeful and disciplined (see Rudé, 1964).

On the other hand:
Rational self-interest can lead to death and destruction as often as it can lead to justice. This is because we poor mortals are geared to short-term outcomes, and because, for many people in power, or seeking to grab power, or simply seeking to elevate their status within the immediate community, it can be more rewarding to make war on our neighbors than to share our work and our wealth.

And while we all share the same reality, we are socially so walled up and insulated that we see our little glimpse of sky in very different ways-- even to the point of using different vocabularies.

Wildfire, drought and hurricane: climate change or god's wrath upon the unbelievers? Technologies of social control have been refined over thousands of years to keep folks in line and blaming each other, even when we know the bosses are lying to us.

We also know that it is part of the way we think --the way our mind is organized-- to confirm our biases, and to reject contrary information (one reason it's helpful every so often to review our own sources); so once we have chosen a path, or a savior, it's very hard to backtrack. We also know --and President Trump's campaigns confirm-- that when people in power license us to attack our neighbors for fun and profit, many of us are happy to take advantage. We know from social media that when we feel no commitment and no responsibility, we can cheerfully spew lies and hatred.

We know that we respond to our experience of deprivation, opportunity, accomplishment, uncertainty, love and violence, that good parents tend to reproduce good parents, that more knowledgeable young people tend to contribute more to the community, that people with good jobs generally lead happier lives (a bit of tautology there). But there is simply no basis for believing, as apparently some Defund the Police folks do, that an abundant welfare society will of itself usher in the reign of peace and justice. Even discounting the global reach of crime networks richer and more powerful than many nations, there are among us a not tiny segment of the population that lives by predation-- folks who not only calculate that robbing the rest of us is economical, but also take joy in getting over on the suckers. And let's say we shift all public funds from the police to social services. Having missed him in the cradle, I don't think there are enough psychologists in the world to cure career criminals like President Trump.

Just as disruptive for our change-the-environment model, we have little reason to trust the folks doing the social engineering. Historically, the people who told us what to do did not come from our communities nor face the choices we have to face. So, however well-intentioned, many of their prescriptions failed to help and often hurt. Many "reform" policies are not well-intentioned at all of course, from eugenics programs to sterilize low income women in the USA to the entire Stalinist project. (The term "enlightened despots" describes various mass murderers who took up select parts of the Enlightenment agenda to tame the Church and their aristocracies, rationalize their tax systems, modernize their militaries, and justify minute interventions in every aspect of their subjects' lives. The USA is not the only inheritor of Enlightenment values.) When I say we can solve our problems, I mean we, all of us, working together, not just some bureaucrat fresh out of grad school; a very big ambition, I know.

So my Enlightenment-colored outlook is not entirely rosy.

What I take from reviewing my own understandings is that I can hope to persuade others to work with me, without assuming that my ideas are self-evident, immediately practicable or immediately rewarding. I can be clear about how I think the world works. Unlike Marxists and other faithful, however, I cannot say that I am on the side of a history heading to one inevitable (however twisty the road) final destination.

**** Contribute information and alternative explanations.**

● Where the discussion drifts free of data, doesn't hurt to add accurate information-- about welfare fraud, immigrants and crime, voter fraud, "free" markets, and a host of issues where Fakes News reports do not reflect the facts.

● It helps a lot to add context --how did we get to this point?-- and draw the links among issues: race and toxic waste, race and health, gender and guns, gender and risk perception, usw. When we talk about immigration it helps to know that nationalist politicians a hundred fifty years ago were saying the exact same thing about Jews, Chinese and Catholics as they say now about Latinx and Muslims.

● To give us some perspective, we can compare what we are going through now to what has happened at other times, in other places. Sometimes I mention that many Muslims and Christians share similar fears about the corruption and immorality of democratic society.

I read about research on a related topic. Participants were given examples of Christian hate crimes such as KKK lynchings, and asked if all Christians should be held responsible. The particpants said No. Then they were asked if all Muslims should be held responsible for Muslim terrorism. The number who blamed all Muslims was substantially less than in a control group that hadn't been asked these questions (Resnick). Sounds like there are at least three elements here: adding information, asking people about their own roles, and thus implicitly inviting them to apply judgment in a consistent way.

Comparisons can be tricky, though. For instance, murderous as they have been, recent presidents are not Hitler, and it hurts our credibility and obscures their crimes when we make blanket statements like that. Some African Americans hate the suggestion that there are parallels between current international mass migration and the slave trade, or even the migration of millions of black people from southern states to the North through a good part of the twentieth century.

● Usually our stories intertwine data and interpretation both, so we can also ask, Do you think there's another way to explain . . . ? Is it possible that . . . ? Someone else might look at this and say . . . . Maybe affirmative action isn't the only possible explanation for why you lost your job. Perhaps there's an explanation for droughts, floods, hurricanes and wildfires other than as God's punishment for same-sex marriage. We can ask folks to say what they think their opponents might argue --for instance, we could ask pro-choice people to explain the anti-abortion position-- and then, given that, what they would say to an anti-abortion activist. Hopefully we can begin to talk with each other, rather than shout past each other; maybe even identify some common ground.

Sometimes we might say, You know, what happened was not your fault.

In all of this, we keep in mind that the most important thing is for participants to work out their own explanations. When initiators add data or context we do it only briefly, to help move the discussion beyond slogans. Many times participants themselves will fill in the gaps.

Why would initiators take a step back at such a critical juncture? One part of the answer is obvious: preaching at people is patronizing, obnoxious and does not work. The second part is

obvious to me, but perhaps not to everyone: when I am confident that my own understanding reflects the world fairly accurately, I am confident that others can access that same understanding because they live in the world too. Which is not to say I and they don't have to work hard to get there.

**** Connect the dots: ideas and issues in context.**

It's critical to order all this new and old information so that we can make use of it. What does immigration have to do with workers' rights? What are the relationships between prosperity and environmental sustainability -- taxes and security -- health and income inequality -- freedom and regulation -- gender and terrorism -- justice for women and justice for men?

Where I live, political workers do not compartmentalize a lot. Each has her own priorities, but there's a great deal of crossover-- union folks will show up for antiracist events, and the racial justice activists support union campaigns. What I don't see so much are stories that link these issues and constituencies; the explanations as to why helping you is going to help me. We do of course frame issues in terms of how they might help or hurt a particular set of folks. But why should old people care about other people's kids? Why should Walmart shoppers give a damn about Walmart wages? The connections may be obvious to activists, but are often less so to the broader community. Collective action to address ongoing shared challenges and interests requires some kind of structure –on a large scale we call it government— and an accepted process for evaluating proposals and judging claims. Some people prefer science, others scripture. Fairly sharing responsibilities and benefits requires democracy.

The key is to keep in mind both macro and micro, principles and practice, ambitious goals and practical policy, and how we move ahead over the long run. Attend to the daily challenges while we keep our eyes on the prize, and know how the former adds up to the latter.

More specifically, we connect the dots in order to

- keep on track and not lose sight of our goals, even as we take the first steps.
- overcome our sense of powerlessness, not knowing what to do because we don't understand what has happened. Our willingness to act, our sense of responsibility, varies with our sense of agency.
- keep motivated over the long haul, because we can see how the daily struggles add up to something big.
- prioritize our tasks, so that we have a good sense of what to focus on at any given time, making deliberate choices and trade-offs, without losing sight of the necessary, less urgent tasks.
- establish a framework for accountability, when many people are working on separate parts of the big project.
- identify potential allies-- Who else has a stake in this work?
- build trust among allies, because we know what to expect from each other.
- fight ferociously against the authoritarians' most effective strategy: divide and rule.

Of course we'll all have different ways to understand the parts and the whole, but many of us can agree on what we are aiming for. To me, it's especially important to choose and explain fights that have the greatest potential to involve people from a broad range of constituencies.

**** Connect people with shared self-interest.**

> "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."
> — Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from the Birmingham Jail

It should be self-evident that Black Lives Matter to us all, but it's not. Sometimes in our passion to demand justice we forget to make the case that helping our neighbors is good for us, too. Nice to think we'd help others because of their need, but it's more reliable to expect us to help others --to expand our circle of responsibility-- because of our own need. If we are to build strong and lasting alliances, we need strong and lasting foundations. When we appeal solely to decency and morality (in company with Judge Roy Moore and a thousand like him, common ground that perhaps we do not need), when we cast ourselves as selfless champions of the downtrodden Other, we forsake our most important tool, our understanding of self-interest-- deTocqueville's "interest well understood" (Damrosch). It's as if lefties have no confidence in their own program. Does inclusive, democratic cooperation help us all or not?

Let's see how we might begin.

Often we can identify shared or overlapping goals. Most of us distrust the parasitic 1%. Many of us loathe this violent, women-hating consumer culture. Many of us think rules are a good idea--rules that serve us. We have different ideas about how to achieve security, but most of us think that would be a good thing. While some want to expand the military and others work hard to defend our rights, lots of people would agree that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Most gun owners agree we need some gun control, although they may not call it that. Many pro-choice advocates see abortion as a last resort, and many anti-abortionists would allow abortion in certain circumstances. We value hard work and sacrifice and cooperation. Many of us fear outsiders --we may define Them differently-- but we also have a strong sense of fairness.

We can look for issues that affect many groups. Miners and factory workers are the first to suffer from the toxic hazards that threaten the whole community. Black people are not the only folks to suffer from poor policing-- just ask women who have been assaulted, or people in one of those counties where the sheriff does whatever he pleases, or taxpayers burdened with the extra costs of crime- and scandal-ridden departments. Legal status for immigrants would mean employers have no reason to prefer immigrant workers solely because they can abused with impunity. (Gordon: ". . . at the core of the [immigration] problem lies the deterioration of work for all low-wage workers.") Pissing on patriarchy can help men romantically and economically.

We can reassess our self-interest in conversation with the neighbors. I wrote above that we have many ways to understand self-interest. When we make those calculations collectively, we open up the possibilities for shared interest. What seems impossible for me on my own can become a very good choice when many of my neighbors want the same thing. We can help reshape each other's stories and priorities.

What are the costs and benefits of loyalty to the boss or sticking to the rules? What do we gain and lose from racism and sexism? At one time, many unions steadfastly resisted letting

immigrants or African Americans join, and opposed policies that would help those groups. They figured racism would help cement their white members' loyalty. Later, some unions, making slightly different calculations, figured welcoming black, Asian and Latinx members would increase their power. Similarly, more and more businesses now admit the scientists are right about climate change-- the investors see opportunities to cash in. We can expand the range of options.

In trying to reconsider where our true interest lies, I think there are two key limiting factors:
a) Do we have the resources to take a long view? In the short run, robbing our neighbors makes sense; honesty pays off only if we establish long-term relationships and interdependence. But that depends on a degree of stability and security that's in short supply right now. (Another reason why the gangsters are so determined to tear up the social safety net.)
b) Do we understand that our personal welfare depends very largely on the peace and prosperity of the community as a whole? We can get a lot done when we understand how much we depend on each other.

To that end it helps to keep in mind and in our words that the systems we depend on most don't work unless all or most of us take part. The billionaires continue to sabotage public schools and affordable health insurance, for instance, under the rubric of consumer choice. They claim to liberate us from burdensome regulation, which is less a relief to the corner deli than a license for massive bank fraud. They promise to cut taxes for all, which means in practice the rich escape their last remaining obligations, and snatch from under the rest of us Social Security, Medicare, and a hundred other strands of the tattered social safety net.

It's not a simple thing to cast the issues broadly. We don't want to trivialize the worst crimes by equating them to injustices suffered less often by more privileged people. We don't want to divert attention and resources from pressing problems by throwing them into an organizational pot with a dozen other goals. One of the groups where I live, for example, discussed incorporating its anti-racism program into a catch-all social justice committee, but some members resisted; they feared the anti-racism work would get lost in the mix. The same could be said for work to counter violence against women or many other important efforts.

At the same time, it's disastrous when we segment our concerns to such a degree that progress for one set of folks seems to require ignoring another-- women's rights or workplace issues at the expense of racial justice, for instance, or vice versa. Revolutionaries in Nicaragua kept telling women, We'll address women's concerns once we establish a just society (as if one could precede the other). We do something similiar in this country.

Often there are valid strategic reasons for focusing on one injustice, one battle, before moving on to others. The very structure of the battlefield can work against us; Immigration policy, for example, does not usually come linked with proposals about good policing, fair wages or workplace safety. It's important nonetheless to have a coherent understanding of the links among these policies and fights, and to commit to the next step. That way we can see how many efforts by many people reinforce each other over time.

Even worse, I think, than too narrow a focus: the D Party practice of spooning out policy goodies to separate constituencies, just enough to bring each group on board, the shallowest kind of favor-trading. This just feeds the rightist narrative that democratic action is no more than

special pleading by "special interests", alien and antagonistic to the majority. Well, that's what a political party is, a loose and shifting agglomeration of interests. Democratic movements, on the other hand, have grander ambitions. I hope they do. Rightists will always caricature justice movements, but we don't have to make it easy for them.

Our big-picture positions have to be more than cosmetic. Some Christians see their anti-abortion work as part of a larger understanding of the "integrity of creation" and respect for all life, but in practice most anti-abortionists also support politicians who attack women, workers, low income people and people of color. I suspect the big picture most anti-abortion people plug into has more to do with gender politics and their identity as white Christians than with an all-embracing love; certainly they have been very picky as to whom they choose to help. We hear sometimes that voters justify supporting otherwise odious candidates based on their opposition to abortion, "But even among white evangelicals and Catholics, more consider issues like the economy, terrorism, foreign policy and immigration to be very important than say the same about abortion. ("Evangelicals Rally to Trump, Religious 'Nones' Back Clinton". See also "Problems and Priorities.") I want democratic activists to promote broad understanding, not convenient excuses.

When we appeal solely to sky-scraping abstractions like "justice" or "humanity", these can serve as signifiers to true believers, but, having no content, mean little to anyone else. Henry recalls a discussion among women: "Though our focus group members had great respect for sex equality, it remained an abstraction removed from their daily world. For these women, equality was a word without a texture, a voice without tone, a form without life— as remote as some arcane scientific theory about the beginning of the cosmos. . . . 'Being equal means . . .' Like cars running out of gas, our focus group women sputtered to get started. Sentences were truncated; verbs had no subjects. Little cross-conversation developed. . . " (p.133). I think Clinton II's Stronger Together is right, but I don't expect everyone to understand it without explanation and real-world application. High-minded principles ungrounded in daily experience are as of much use to us as an extrasolar asteroid, wandering in the vacuum.

Then too, big claims untethered to substance are good cover for crime. The history of the world is the history of mass murderers shouting God! or Liberation!

Above all, we should resist with all our power the rightists' attempts to divide us and set us at each others' throats. I was struck by Cramer's account of how Wisconsin governor Scott Walker mobilized rural communities against public employees, depicting the latter as porking out at taxpayer expense while small towns wither away (Chotiner). Instead of seeing the public sector as an oasis of service and workers' rights, a model and a refuge, some people see it as a high-walled citadel of privilege, parasitic on the real producers. (This includes some teachers, police, health workers, and soldiers who rail against Big Government without ever wondering where their own salaries come from.) In some places they're right. More often, I suspect, public sector workers support families which also include low wage, less secure private sector workers and their kids.

So while we fight where we have the most leverage at this moment, or where folks are most at risk, we've also got to keep making the case that all these battles are part of the world-wide struggle to defend our communities. Constant reference to the big goals may seem boring and bland, and maybe foolish, but we're wrong if we think our neighbors can never understand (more

likely, it's the messenger they distrust). And we say this not just to pay lip service, but because if we don't understand the truth of these connections we are bound to fail.

**** What if? Aim high. Push the envelope.**

In 2016 the Democrat candidates were shouting past each other. Why not Medicare for all? Sanders said. And free college tuition. And a minimum wage of $15.

Impossible, Clinton retorted. No way. Pie in the sky. Stick with me I'll get you what can be got. But don't fall for grandiose promises that can't be kept.

It was the old fight: pragmatism versus aspiration. Years before, Clinton had said President Lyndon Johnson brought us civil rights. She focussed on the mechanics of legislation and lining up votes. I know how to do these things, she said. Political conmen will promise you the moon and stars but can't deliver.

Not a good argument for this particular candidate. Thirty years in public life, and who can name her accomplishments? Nevertheless, a good point. There's the claiming, and there's the doing-- especially challenging with respect to long-term, global problems like corruption and climate change. Many of us get nervous when politicians seem to promise us the moon. We figure that if the moon were within reach, we would have grabbed hold of it long before now.

Couple elements to our skepticism: our own experience of how the world works --there's no free lunch-- and also our investment in the way we've accommodated ourselves to the world. Those not clobbered by war, climate change or the other gifts of capitalism tend to see the world as dense, stable, and hard to move except incrementally. In turn, we see ourselves as hard-headed, practical. We've had to make tough choices in our lives, because we saw no other way, and we tell our kids that life isn't fair. We don't like any suggestion that we've settled for less than we could have achieved.

Skepticism is valuable. It's far better than the learned helplessness of looking to someone else to save us, or the cynical calculation that we can save ourselves only by sucking up to gangsters. Skepticism makes it more difficult to bring people to this work, but, if we can address their questions, makes their commitment stronger. Skepticism disciplines us to figure out how to turn dreams into reality. Churchill promised blood, sweat and tears, and put steel into the fight against the Nazis.

How about this proposal of medicare for all? Polls indicate that most people want greater access to health care, and increasing numbers like the medicare for all idea (McCammond). Nevertheless, many think --have been instructed-- that it's too good to be true, and before the 2018 elections it was not clear that campaigning to expand medicare would help candidates win elections (Demko). Vermont voters turned down such a proposal in 2014; they weren't so anxious about their present coverage that they were willing to pay higher taxes for something better. Possibly they didn't know the full extent to which they were already paying for a very inefficient health care system.

Certainly, politicians who promise cheap health care without bothering with the details can generate a lot of needless distrust when their constituents find out much later that actually, the high costs are going to have to come out of someone's pocket. Remember that president who said no one would lose their current insurance under his big health coverage program? Perhaps he

didn't trust them to weigh the true costs and benefits for themselves. In any case, his lie resulted only in intensifying that distrust and deflecting it back on him.

Perhaps it was Obama's self-proclaimed "ruthless pragmatism" that led him to go AWOL from the health care debate in the first place. He left it up to Congress to put together the details of the Affordable Care Act, because he didn't want to have to take responsibility and put a big target on his back like Clinton had in the 1990's. But Obama's arms-length posture "left the door open to a lobbying onslaught" (Hirsh 297). Anyhow, the ACA may have been hobbled at birth by an earlier act of presidential pragmatism, Obama's decision not to hold Wall Street accountable for the massive fraud behind the economic crisis of 2007-8. Hirsh thinks it was "the prairie fire backlash to the bank bailouts that ultimately killed the 'public option,' a government alternative to private health insurance . . ." (277). Sometimes people call themselves "pragmatic" when they don't want to say "timid, shortsighted".

Sometimes, on some issues, folks are ready to discount the conventional wisdom and take big risks for change. Wide support for laws curbing pollution, the millions who chose Trump and Sanders in 2016, and the Brits' vote to flee the European Union showed not just dissatisfaction with the status quo, but many people's willingness to sacrifice for the chance at something more to their liking.

Henry describes a series of women's workshops. Sometimes the facilitators would change directions and ask What if? questions. "[T]hat old women's can-do spirit reappeared when the moderator used her Magic Wand again to instantly produce a 50 percent female congressional representation . . . . Suddenly, like sunlight after a southern thunderstorm, the tone turned positive" (p.323). At other times the long views provoked the usual disbelieving response. But it helps every so often to stand on our tiptoes and look to the horizon. What is the point of all this hard work and suffering?

What if everyone could enroll in Medicare? What if we jailed one hundred hedge fund managers for fraud? . . . treated climate change as a threat to national security . . . forced the transnationals to disgorge the trillions they've been hiding from the IRS . . . processed rape kits in weeks, not years? . . . What if the U.S. quit subsidizing Israel's occupation of Palestine . . . nonpartisan commissions determined electoral districts . . . the West quit selling weapons to terrorists and dictators . . . the minimum wage were set high enough for workers to feed their families . . . every student could access the same resources as kids in wealthy suburbs . . . lobbyists and politicians had to divulge their funding sources . . . the Supreme Court served democracy rather than the ultra-wealthy . . . ? What would the world be like, and what would my life be like?

If I were to ask these questions, I'd say, let's set aside for the moment all the practical difficulties. If we had the power to change our lives and communities, what would we do first? How would big changes affect our lives?

Then I'd ask, What stands in our way? What would it take to move forward? How would we explain this to the neighbors? Here we start translating aspirations into practical steps. We acknowledge the difficulties without losing confidence in our ability to deal with them.

It's important to connect near-term goals with what we're aiming for in the long run. On the one hand, seems like a lot of work to build a neighborhood group just to get a stop sign put in at a dangerous intersection. On the other, something like justice or democratic government can seem awfully abstract and far away unless we see that we are making progress in the right direction.

We can look for some sort of measureable payback this year, however modest, without expending all our resources --perhaps burning all our bridges-- to get this immediate win. Don't eat the seed corn.

They say feathers originated as a means to insulate the birds' ancestral dinosaurs. Only later did they become a key adaptation helping birds fly. So too can our short-term accomplishments add up to something much bigger, sometimes something we cannot yet foresee. Building our neighborhood organization, that can be the foundation for a movement. (Thinking this way also helps us choose among competing strategies. Which has the more lasting impact, winning a lawsuit or passing legislation supported by most voters?)

Working for fundamental change costs us time, money and sometimes friendships. Activists risk poverty, jail or worse. Even with lots of skill and patience they might fall short. So one big question is whether our goals are worth the risk and expense. No one wants to beat her head against the wall. But how do we tell if the wall is brick or cardboard?

We could ask, Who here has ever bought a lottery ticket? What were the odds? Anyone here ever taken a risk to get or do something you really wanted (have kids, start a business, fall in love . . .)? How did that turn out? Looking back, win or lose, do you think it was worth the effort?

Now, how about democracy (racial justice, equal opportunity for women, a clean economy . . .)? Do you think these are important goals? What odds would you accept to take part in the effort to make these happen?

We could ask, What happens if we fail? and, How can we protect folks on the front line?

We also keep in mind the fact that folks who don't believe the status quo can change will never change it. Candidate Clinton was saying she didn't know how to achieve big goals, so they could not be achieved. And why would she want to? She and her sponsors and her entourage have been, just by coincidence, the great beneficiaries of their own corporatist policies. The economists and talking heads --yes, the very folks who brought us the Great Meltdown of 2008-- continue to fall over themselves proving that single-payer health care is impossible, that the U.S. can prosper without making anything, that tech will fix climate change.

We know too that no status quo can last forever. The Founders wrestled and wrote a Constitution that, for the first time in history, did not threaten religious dissenters with prison and execution. Europeans established strong social service programs over a hundred years ago, as impractical, fuzzy-minded Senator Sanders likes to point out. Organized labor won a seat at the table for a couple generations. Black folks and others tore down Jim Crow. The environmental movement helped subdue soaring cancer rates in rich countries, and delayed mass extinction for a few decades. Rebellious Poles provoked the collapse of Stalin's empire. Democratic movements don't always succeed, but they do sometimes. The good things we have today we have because other folks fought so hard to build them.

Grassroots activists have to fight entrenched interests every day. The status quo evolved over centuries, and it's hard to change. But as we climb over or grind through walls and mountains and minefields, as we untangle barbed webs of deceit and vested interest, day after day, we also keep our eyes on the prize.

There's also the Why not? question. How come we don't have single payer cradle to grave health care like Japan, Canada, Australia and Western Europe? Why don't we insist on trade deals that protect our workforce, like China and many other countries? Why don't we aim for an energy

system much less dependent on nuclear power and fossil fuels, as Germany and Japan are doing? For decades other countries have enjoyed advantages that our politicians insist are impossible. There are some things we have here --the first amendment for instance-- that politicians elsewhere say are unrealistic fantasies, and can never be achieved.

They are not impossible. These are real solutions, not fantasies. They just require more democracy.

If we think these are worthy goals, then we got to figure out how to get there from here. But we'll know our direction, and that's important.

**** Retell our stories and share them.**

In Crimes of Obedience Kelman writes that to challenge authority, we have to redefine the situation (p.138). Which is the path of responsibility, justice and self-interest? We can't let the 1% and their hireling pundits and professors determine the range of choices we have, but it's hard to change our story if there are no others available. That makes it all the more important to hear stories from other people and to reconsider our own. Given the chance to reconsider our experience, and encouragement to retell our stories in our own words rather than recitations from the talking heads, sometimes we come up with meanings beyond the labels we've applied all these years. For example, when asked about their experience with government services, folks who have echoed the right's complaints for many years may come to allow as how, despite its faults, government matters, and good government can help us.

When we hear what the neighbors have to say, we also have the chance to recalculate the risks and possibilities of democratic action. When we see lots of neighbors with their minds set on freedom --and achieving it, bit by bit-- quiet submission or criminal complicity no longer seem like the smart bets.

**** What can I do? Power and responsibility.**

Sharot says we respond better when we feel we have a choice, and suggests we frame our proposals in those terms.

> Consider the need for agency, for instance. When people feel in control of their life and environment, they become happier. But when they believe their ability to control their environment has been removed -- when they think another political group is determining the law of the land or feel their spouse is dictating their actions -- they become anxious. Because people desire to feel in control, they are also more receptive to information that expands their sense of it.
>
> For example, a study conducted at Harvard University found that allowing citizens to suggest how their taxes should be used (e.g., for education, healthcare, science and so on) increased their intention to pay them by two-fold. Accordingly, explaining to parents how vaccinations can help them protect their children enhances their sense of control and makes them more open to the message.

The rightists use this language all the time. They tell us we should be able to choose our doctors, schools for our kids, the most convenient technology, and so forth. "Consumer choice" is the preferred term for privatization, deregulation, oligopoly, slashing public service, externalizing costs, and the endless party of billionaires run amuck.

Do-gooders could adopt some of this language. For instance, the payoff for mandatory enrollment in health care insurance pools would an enormous increase in the range of choices open to us personally-- access to quality care, more freedom to change jobs, more attention to other family needs, extra years of life.

But it's more than a question of rewording policy proposals. Those proposals should be coming from stakeholders in the first place, everyone who'd be affected by the policy. Every political discussion we have should wend its way to the question: So what should be done? followed by, Who should do it?

There are all sorts of parallel questions about responsibility. If the experts and authorities don't take responsibility, then who must? How does personal responsibility operate within larger social forces? Some us will fight for justice no matter what, but for the most part, we don't invest a lot of hope and effort in new directions unless we see a clear path forward.

Grassroots organizations have centuries of experience building and applying political power. It's something we have to talk about up front. How do the bosses get and keep power? How can we build our own? These are not academic questions, because they help us understand how can we establish and implement the policies we want. Most of this work has to take place within membership organizations, but we can start the conversation in any political context. It's pretty central.

Without this context of grassroots power our political positions are likely to remain frozen. Seeing few choices, most of us stick to the slogans our bosses have chosen for us. We vote our identities. It's only when we believe we can actually affect decisions that we take responsibility for solving our problems. And it's in those practical solutions that we find the common ground.

Here it's also worth kicking over the notion that we have no choice. Sometimes this is no more than an excuse for, say, burning down an abortion clinic. We can begin to take responsibility for our actions, or our neglect.

** **Commit.** Just talking with each other about these tough issues is hard work, and risky. We do it out of necessity. We face very difficult problems and we have to solve them. So it's important not to conclude our discussions without some commitment to take action, however modest, or at least to meet again.

§ **Grapple with big questions.** Some of what I'd like to hear folks talk about:

** **The crisis: What are the key problems we face?** How have these affected us and our families? Who benefits from the way things are? Who has the power to make changes?

Again, it's important to probe for details. Let's say someone says immigration is a big problem. I'd ask, how does that affect you? If people say, They're taking our jobs, we can ask, Do you know anyone who lost a job to immigrants? In some communities that has happened. The most deeply entrenched racism, however, shows up in places with few people of color (Rothwell p.8), so it's likely that the fury over decaying economies and declining status has been displaced toward safer targets. We can also ask, Who decides who gets hired and fired? How do we hold those folks accountable? Why would employers choose to hire immigrants? Why would many immigrants need to accept lower wages?

Sometimes we hear about declining morality, or taking away prayer in the schools, as the source of our problems. So we can ask how that has manifested locally. Has it gotten worse over time-- how so? How have we been affected personally? Perhaps we'll hear about abortion, sexism, consumerism, wage theft, internet scams, abusive bosses and corrupt politicians-- including many points on which we can agree. We could remind people that Christians run every branch of government, and that there is no prohibition whatsoever on personal prayer in schools or anywhere else in this country.

We've got to keep asking, Who has the power? Then an undifferentiated mass of abuses and corruptions begins to resolve into particular policies and the people who make them.

**** The powerful; loyalty and skepticism**.

We experience good and bad bosses, but other things affect our attitudes toward the powerful, especially our positions of dependence or relative autonomy. Can we see alternatives available to this partner, school, church, job? If we feel we have to put up with a lot of abuse because we have no choice, still it's useful to acknowledge that. That way we don't start pretending that we like the abuse, and take responsibility for it, and defend it.

We can ask, Who are the bosses where you live? Who are *their* bosses? Again, it's important to identify who makes the decisions, and where the responsibility lies.

We can ask, What does it take to become a boss? Do you think you'll ever be a boss? What makes a good boss? If you were the boss, how would you treat your employees? If we believe our fellow workers are naturally stupid, lazy and dishonest, then we'll say the boss has to be tough. But we can also ask each other, are we ourselves such bad employees?

I worked once for a community education center. We did a series about environmental problems. Roleplaying the corporate managers turned out to be very helpful. If you were a polluter, what would you do to make money and stay out of jail? Participants would suggest all the things they'd seen in real life: falsify reports, hire dishonest experts, capture the regulators, send in legions of lawyers to sow confusion, divide the community, threaten resisters . . . it helped us understand motive and strategy.

**** Our neighbors; dis/trust**.

Can't do collective action without trust, but it sure is hard to build. Lots of us trust the boss more than our neighbors. And we can scarcely overestimate the intense feelings of betrayal that drive so much of the rightist response to movements of liberation.

I know a guy who constantly complains about the family and friends who have failed him. He plunges into relationships with great enthusiasm, and drops them months later in bitter disappointment, reaffirming his conviction that he can't rely on anyone. From what I can gather, his expectations are both unrealistic and unspoken. He expects people to know what he wants without telling them --every decent person should know how to act right! he thinks-- and imputes malice to them when they don't measure up. Not coincidentally, he works hard to ingratiate himself with authority figures, while badmouthing them behind their backs.

I also know people who try the communications thing over and over again, without result. The other person doesn't understand, or doesn't care, or gets all defensive. When raising questions simply intensifies conflict without resolving anything, it makes us not even want to try. Resentments fester in silence. In part I think these failures stem from the very narrow sense of responsibility many of us feel-- in this very strange society we claim it a virtue not to care what other people think.

Maybe distrust derives also from a lack of skill and structure. It doesn't come naturally to most of us to focus on solving problems instead of laying blame, and the immediate incentives are are all to paper over problems rather than tackle them head-on. In theory communication should be easier within and among community groups, because they have to have some kind of process and structure for sharing ideas, questions and fears. Unfortunately, in some organizations the very act of raising questions is so rare that people freak out. Instead of seeing communication as the central act of community, they see it as threatening and divisive.

Even more important, I think we tend to have unrealistic expectations of each other, and don't communicate them. When we see our own experience as the norm, and think our big decisions are obvious choices between right and wrong, and see evil intent behind decisions we don't like, and think that people in general are weak and wicked, and figure coercion is the only way to get others to act right . . . why, naturally trust is hard to come by. We got to try it, though, because otherwise we are alone and helpless against the gangsters.

So let's ask some questions: Ever heard the expression, I've got your back? What does that mean, really? To whom do we give unconditional support? So why should we expect that from others? What would it take, what would another person have to do, for me to be able to count on her? What would I have to know about other people to be ready to make promises to them? Has anyone ever tried to force you to do something? How did that work? **Why would any of us help each other?** and so on.

**** Who belongs? Insiders and outsiders.**

When we talk about people like us we are also describing the pool of potential allies, the people who can stand with us to help our community. Me, I need lots of help, so I want expand the circle of insiders. The fences are very high, though, with razor wire at the top.

Years ago one of my GED students, a black woman a bit older than me, was complaining about immigrants. They are coddled by social services, and get all sorts of special preference they don't deserve. I asked, what do you think rich people say about people getting welfare and disabilities assistance? I said, what about Zuleyka, the Bosnian who cleans the toilets? My student said,

Maybe I should change my thinking. I said, Get more information. Ask them why they came here. Ask what kind of help they've been getting.

So one way to challenge assumptions is to ask each other how outsiders would characterize our own groups, and whether that description is fair or complete. We can also help underscore the fact that the boundaries among groups are more permeable than we commonly assume. One exercise I saw used a lot is to have participants physically place themselves in lines along continua of age, education, wealth, gender, ethnicity, legal standing, political power et cetera. The clumps we form do not match the fixed categories usually assigned to us.

We can add information, such as the history of violence and discrimination against successive waves of immigrants, including groups now considered white, who were not a hundred fifty years ago. We can point out the exact same language used to attack immigrants then and now. We can ask who benefits when politicians campaign against outsiders-- and what happens to insiders who disagree?

Crucially, we can acknowledge the legitimacy of our questions about outsiders. We have a right to ask who they are and what they want. It's not stupid to be concerned that a lot of new people may displace us economically and culturally (as much as Walmart does?), and that we may be excluded from new flows of information and influence (as we ourselves have done to others). What's not fair is to jump to a bunch of conclusions without bothering to look for true answers, which for the most part are right in front of us.

As we try to peel away the most destructive aspects of class, race and gender, I remind myself that identities always come attached to ideal behaviors. I tend to see the high-falutin talk as little more than flimsy justification for privilege and exploitation. For instance, I find it hard to separate the notion of manly men defending helpless women, from the common daily reality of rape and other violence against women, or, in my neck of the woods, the would-be gentility and honor of would-be Confederates from the brutal violence of slavery, capitalist labor markets and gangster hierarchy. But in this matter I may be a bit too cynical.

However little practiced, the ideals are important. We all need to see ourselves in the best light; and sometimes the ideals inspire us to do better. We remember Jefferson for his call to democracy, not for raping the people he'd bought. (In case you haven't been able to figure out the difference between Tom Jefferson and Robert E. Lee: Jefferson did not lead a war in defense of slavery, killing 600,000 Americans in the process.)

Something else: our group identities encompass the people who are most important to us, including our parents and their parents. We need to continue to honor those people and what they mean to us even as we seek to reconfigure which groups we identify with and how.

Here's an idea: whyn't we take each other at our word? When we talk about traditional values like hard work, sacrifice, responsibility, and helping each other in crisis, let's hold each other to these commitments, even as we broaden their application. We respect these ideas and traditions. What we reject is using them to claim special virtue and special privilege. We can appreciate each other's unique contributions without claiming therefore that one group gets to lord it over all the rest.

Let's take it a step further. We talk a lot about community but rarely explain what we mean by this term. We tend to take it for granted. Perhaps we should be more deliberate in explaining what we mean when we refer to community. It goes to the heart of the insider / outsider question.

If we can discuss community preemptively, before we come to the debates about immigration, class, deservingness or the biggest threats, maybe we'd be able to find common ground on some of these issues.

We could ask ourselves, What are my communities? (Let's specify the people with whom we interact, not bots, avatars, porn stars and celebrity tweets.) What makes my community special? What would we like others to know about our communities? What do we want our kids to value? What makes communities strong? And if one answer is, shared values, we can ask, How do we come by these shared values?

What makes a good neighbor (besides fences)? What should we be able to expect from them? My guess is that the answers folks come up with will not hinge on ethnicity, high walls or constant conflict. We can go from there to talk about how to defend and strengthen our communities.

If we ask each other to write our ideas on cards before speaking, we could see how much folks' ideas overlap, even among people from very different neighborhoods.

The neighbor question leads to a very big discussion: What responsibilities do we have to our community? Which in turn touches on our ideas of freedom, government, charity, what holds a community together and what tears it down. How do we balance everyone's right to food, shelter and employment with the need to sustain the community as a whole? The labor, civil rights and women's movements made great strides in opening public assistance programs to folks regardless of race or religion, a huge advance. The party of the rich have been retaliating against recipients ever since, requiring them to piss in cups, accept minimum wage jobs and endure a host of time-wasting pro forma activities about as meaningful as mandatory political rallies under Mao or Stalin. They say the poor must take responsibility, while refusing to take any themselves. But since "Social policies are much less likely to be endorsed by public opinion when they reward people independent of whether and how much they contribute to society" (Fehr 1-10-02), the balance of rights and responsibilities is not a theoretical question.

It would be interesting to have community exchanges. For instance, if rural and city people got together in a room, how would their answers parallel or differ? We can learn from each other.

So what the hell happened to Stronger Together in 2016? No need to rehash the terabytes that have already been sputtered about President Trump's victory, but I'll comment briefly because what we saw relates so closely to this question of who belongs.

I liked the Stronger Together slogan but it didn't work --not well enough, anyway-- because the Dcrats applied it so superficially. I never heard anyone explain just how we many classes, genders, generations and ethnic groups are stronger together. Seems like it should be beyond dispute, doesn't it? But when so many of us experience nothing but zero-sum competition --how could that be?-- it's a mistake to assume we all get unaided the Stronger Together idea. That the candidate's strategy for this campaign, and life-long practice, was to assemble a coalition united mostly by yuppy social liberalism plus the random bits of policy goodies the candidate promised to hand out when she won did nothing to contradict the idea that we are all scrambling for a piece of the very limited pie, and that someone else got there ahead of us. Add to that a triumphalist tone: We are the future, and we are winning! You (old white) dinosaurs, please just lie down and admit you're extinct.

(Two years later, some of the liberals were still at it, as when they lost the Florida mid-terms because they took Latinx there for granted-- "Instead of organizing year-round, they've assumed demography would be destiny. Instead of selling progressive policies aggressively on Spanish-language media, they've assumed their positions on issues like immigration and health care would speak for themselves. . . . Democrats think they can introduce themselves to Hispanics a few months before Election Day with stump speeches and TV ads." Grunwald and Caputo, 12-4-18.)

Strategically and democratically, it's beyond dispute: we have to confront racism, sexism and homophobia --and the religions that sanctify them-- as well as economic and class discrimination. For many years unions and community organizations tiptoed around these elephants in the room, figuring it was too divisive even to mention them, and fantasizing that the party of billionaires and TV preachers would not. So I was thrilled at the optics of the 2016 Democratic national convention, so many people represented. I give H. Clinton a lot of credit for inviting Khizr Khan to speak, and to him for hitting it out of the park.

We may have been misled, however, by the astonishing turnaround on gender issues among young people, and the threat and promise that people of color will soon overtake the white population, and the misapprehension that race is the only gaping chasm in this country. Do we think justice is inevitable, that all we need do is announce our commitment to the side of the angels, then just plunk in our kayaks and ride the flow of history?

No one mistakes liberals' cheerful chatter about "demographics" as anything other than counting on old white people to die off, the sooner the better. "We're not going to convince O'Reilly and his demographic," Walsh writes. "We have to out-organize, out-vote and out-live them."

Which demographic is that? All old white guys are incorrigible racists? All white people? All Christians? Talk about bigotry. These may not be the first folks liberals would canvass during an election, but after we sneer at them so gleefully we can't claim that that "demographic" has abandoned the do-gooder cause solely out of racism. It's we who have abandoned them. Clinton and her team made a conscious decision to bypass all these reddish communities— that's how she won the election.

After her 2018 victory against a Dcrat party macher, rising star Ocasio-Cortez said, ". . . the way that progressives win on an unapologetic message is by expanding the electorate. . . . not by rushing to the center. It's not by trying to win . . . . over those who have other opinions. It's by expanding the electorate, speaking to those that feel disenchanted, dejected, cynical about our politics, and letting them know that we're fighting for them" (Ocasio-Cortez 7-16-18).

Sure be nice to bring low income and otherwise marginalized people into the political process. Many grassroots organizations have been trying to do this for decades. I hope better candidates and platforms will encourage more people to take part in elections. But if new voters are not integrated into the community in more lasting ways, we end up with little more than the kind of protest vote that most often tips towards Trumpian candidates. "Tear it down" only reshuffles elites unless there's a commitment and a program to replace them.

Makes sense that elections are the not the time to expend scarce resources trying to rehab traumatized people trapped in the rat-ridden basements of Facebook and Fox News. Bothers me, though, the implicit assumption by some of these new-electorate folks (though not apparently by Vermont's Senator Sanders), that some people are just born racist, homophobic capitalists, and

remain that way forever after, whereas the rest of us are naturally fair and selfless. That's just flat-out untrue. We know a lot about how people acquire these fears and hatreds, and the conditions which foster them. If we can become one thing we can become another. As for "speaking to those that feel disenchanted, dejected, cynical,"-- there are plenty of these in the old no-good electorate, and many voted for President Trump.

It may well be the case that we shan't be able to pry President Trump from the hearts of most of the folks who voted for him despite all the ridicule throughout the 2016 campaign and since. As we know --as often we count on-- it's very hard for us to forswear our commitments, once we've made them so publicly. It's too shameful to admit our mistakes. Under pressure, though, we do sometimes surreptitiously back off, change the subject, and hope people forget what we've said or done. Look what happened to many of us in the course of the civil rights and antiwar movements a couple generations ago. Eventually we became embarrassed by our unthinking obedience and destructive prejudices, and eased away on tiptoes from positions no longer tenable. That kind of silent disinvestment in turn opens up space for new understandings and commitments-- to legalizing immigrant kids, say, or restricting access to machineguns, or investing in energy sources that won't drown coastal cities. When our President is out of the picture, his fans may have occasion to direct their loyalties elsewhere.

But only if the rest of us help forge those opportunities. For people who prefer democracy, to turn their backs on low- and middle-income white rightists would just confirm the latter's sense of abandonment that brought us to this pass in the first place. Let's not make it so easy for them. Can't say we like democracy if we treat the *demos* so carelessly.

Even if we could dismiss whole states and communities, we have no reason to assume racism will die out with the oldsters. The yups so eager to wish millions away with a wave of the hand fail to understand that bigotry is a permanent, indispensable part of the politicians' toolkit, applied to every generation. The main targets may vary from time to time, but they serve the same function. I've seen zero evidence that, for instance, people of color are less homophobic than white people, or that gay people are less racist than straight people. We know that half of white women voted for President Trump, as did half of college grads (Fidel). White professional-class environmentalists are subject to the same derangements as other gringos. If we don't bother to make the case for race and gender justice among old white people, we'll have nothing to say to young people, either.

There's another school of thought, equally useless. As after every election, some people took the 2016 results to mean liberals have got to back off the commitment to racial and gender justice; too divisive, they say. But surely that's short-sighted. We can't let the Putin-Murdoch Broadcasting Co. drive these wedges into our communities, any more than we should reckon these to be the only battlegrounds.

Likewise, some do-gooders fear that engaging old white people means backing off the insistence on radical reform-- compromising, that dirty word. But of course this is not true at all. Overturning gangster power and policy helps everyone but the gangsters. Or has the self-appointed vanguard of the proletariat lost confidence in its own program? If the radically democratic agenda truly does address the real needs of the 99%, its champions ought to be able to explain how.

Of course racism played a big role in the 2016 election. It was once again the core of the Republican campaign. We know that, historically, a scapegoating bigotry is the default position when we are too scared to address our real problems. But more than a few Trump voters had voted for the black guy four years before (Roarty). These are people whose forebears smuggled runaway slaves and fought mine operators and railroad barons and joined the Wobblies and won the vote for women. I ask myself, Why would so many millions vote for a racist woman-hating billionaire? Then I ask myself, Why would so many millions vote for a timid, distrustful centimillionaire in thrall to Goldman Sachs?

The fact is, the Clintonites of this country offer little beyond patronage politics and I'd like to buy the world some coke. Certainly Democrats' complicity in gutting local economies over the last couple of generations made it easy for the party of rich racists to portray Democrats as limousine liberals who don't give a damn about working people. Leading Dcrats join hands with Republicans to offshore and robotize U.S. manufacturing, even as they cheer Walmart and Amazon in their devastatingly successful campaigns to purge small business from our communities. We think of economic policy as an argument about numbers, but of course it's really about winners and losers and how we choose them. Corporatist Democrats make it very clear whose side they take.

I'm embarrassed to admit, until 2016, I thought the limousine liberal was just another Roger Ailes-Karl Rove-Rupert Murdoch invention. By gum, they are real! I seen 'm on TV! A bunch of smug aging yuppies, not just rich, but willing to countenance the obscene wealth and corporatist subservience of their candidate; not just certain of their righteousness but happy to dismiss out of hand the tens of millions of families who don't share their bright prospects. The Clintonite attitude reminds me of no one so much as the Young Republicans sent to run conquered Iraq in 2003: We won, screw you. Except they lost.

Probably they were counting on gratitude for the benefits Democrat policy has afforded white men as well as women and people of color over the decades: Social Security, workers' compensation, food assistance, health insurance, student loans, safety and health regs, subsidized housing, the Civil Rights Act and the Clean Water Act, to name a few. Back when we had strong unions and community organizations, such measures needed no explanation, because they arose from grassroots action. But under the racist Reaganite backlash, "triangulating" Clintonites stopped defending public services long ago. Democrats woke briefly in 2010 to pass the Affordable Care Act, and spent the next six years running away from it. In a gross miscalculation of both political strategy and basic psychology, President Obama decided the legislation needed no defense; that once enrolled in the health insurance program, people would fight to keep it. Given the ideological vacuum he and his party left, Obama could have foreseen that many people would cling to their ACA while cursing Obamacare. As I write Democrats are defending public health care programs with far more vigor than ever before; but seeing as how millions of ACA beneficiaries voted for the politicians who vowed to destroy the program, along with civil rights, labor unions, consumer protections and the environment, this is a tiny little bit too damned late.

So much of the Democrat program in recent years smacks of *noblesse oblige*-- the well-meaning, well-off, doing-well-by-doing-good class of administrators and professionals helping out the poor and oppressed, treating people as categories, and sometimes treating whole communities as victims and clients rather than as precious allies whom we need as much as they need us. This

posture goes back a century or more, when the earlier generation of Progressives tried to train the lower orders to sit up straight and Don't slurp the soup, and liberal churches sent missionaries to bring the gospel to heathen Appalachians.

I have nothing but admiration for social services staffers on the front lines today, working hard to counter the effects of poverty, homelessness, ill health, miseducation and domestic violence. They are hobbled by politicians' moralizing politics and miserly allocations. The targets of all this charitable outpouring --outtrickling? outpissing?-- may perceive more disrespect than is intended, but who wants to be thrown into a box labelled Problems? Some of us fear and exploit outsiders. Others merely patronize them.

The work of democracy has always been much more than electing Democrats. It's more urgent than ever to restore our sense of community. This essay is largely an argument that if we're serious about these commitments we have to actively engage with our neighbors on what we and they care about most.

***** Racists.**

As we know, racism is way more than prejudice, more than a personality flaw. Obsessive hatred has a social and institutional context. It's a product of the whole complex of authoritarian disorders, and dismantling racism requires addressing all of these.

All of us stereotype each other, making broad generalizations based on largely superficial characteristics. That's how our poor brains skim and sort data from an otherwise overwhelming universe. Most of us fear strangers, because until we get to know them we don't know what to expect. Racism is more than that. Racism aggregates ignorance, makes it a virtue, and turns it into an organized system of exploitation. You know this.

You may also know, but I do not, how best to fight this pestilence.

<u>Some efforts we know that may help but do not suffice</u>:

● the indirect approach. I mentioned above that many community groups find it hard to tackle head-on issues like racism, for fear of increasing conflict among members and weakening the organization. Instead, they encourage gringos and people of color to work together on issues of shared interest, in the hopes that over time they will overcome their biases and build strong relationships. I wrote above that it is unrealistic to expect us to come to grips with racism without explicit attention to how it operates in our communities and our organizations. Generally we don't look for answers if we are not raising the questions.

● Likewise, appeals to our common humanity are of limited use. When the preachers say, Brethren, they don't mean everyone. They mean the men in their congregation. It's usually a metaphor for long-term, family-like relationships. Not many people like me have long term relationships with people of color, and when we do, we most likely have already made some kind of commitment to fairness. The appeal to common humanity can also be a kind of code for deservingness: You are acceptable just as long as you talk and act and think like me.

Because of all the forces that sustain racism, the anti-racist message is important to sustain and elaborate and repeat again and again, without becoming so ritualized and pro forma as to seem

insincere and hypocritical. But churches and community groups that make a practice of addressing racism are usually preaching to the choir. What about all the groups for whom explicit or tacit racism is the glue that holds them together? The idea that we might have something in common with members of other groups would strike many of us as nonsensical. The ways they look, talk, eat, worship . . . they are not like us at all. They have different loyalties. They don't belong.

● Sometimes we try to juice up gringos' sympathy by recounting some of the terrible things that happen to people of color. Problem is, white people already know this, even when we are not leading these attacks ourselves. We are protected from our natural impulse for compassion and empathy by our need to believe in a just world, our learned inclination to blame the victim, and daily inoculation by a thousand lies we hear in church, school, and from the White House. We get sick of hearing about problems we don't know how to solve. And after all, there is more suffering in the world than most of us can bear. We walk over homeless people every day without a second thought. We watch immigrant neighbors and coworkers hauled off to concentration camps. So those of us who love all humankind should not expect it to be reciprocated.

Further, there is research that exclusive focus on the suffering of the downtrodden can actually strengthen the racist response. We want to know what's in it for us:

> . . . the findings from this study are unambiguous – the strategy of using the current problems faced by racial and ethnic minorities to appeal for policy reforms, followed by a value or moral imperative that tries to incite action on the part of policymakers, is ineffective for building public support for immigration reform. The fact that at least two of the values treatments we tested (Opportunity for All and Fairness Across Groups) actually depress immigration policy support . . . . they remind the public that the reform policies discussed will likely benefit a small group of "others," and as a result, they do not answer the essential question that values respond to in a frame: Why should I be concerned?
>
> --Manuel and Simon pp.11, 12

> Advocates should not take this to mean that they should avoid talking about race or ethnicity nor the benefits that might accrue to racial and ethnic minorities if immigration policy reforms are enacted. Rather, advocates should use race-neutral values at the top of their communications as a foundation for, and to set the tone for, more elaborate discussions about immigration reforms that have substantial implications for racial and ethnic minorities. That is, our admonition to advocates remains clear – talk values AND talk race, but start the public conversation with stand-alone values (like Prosperity) to set up the subsequent conversation about specific policies and the benefit to racial and ethnic minorities. --ibid p. 18

● Sharing personal stories about the effects of racism can work in circumstances of mutual respect and exchange, where white people listen because they are listened to. Even though we have not been slammed the hardest, white folks can access some of the experience of people of color. Most

all of us have suffered from negative stereotyping of one kind or another-- class, age, appearance, etc. Almost all of us can recall times the system failed us just when we needed it the most. At one time or another, all of us need help. I have attended gatherings where people drawn together by common experience and shared threats can learn a lot from each other. But these are unusual conditions. Most of us don't have this kind of opportunity for deep sharing.

Identifying shared interest and building personal relationships are indispensable first steps. They are not usually enough in themselves to hold off the constant racist onslaught, in part because we are quite capable of distinguishing between individuals we like and groups we loathe, and in part because the act of working together without a conscious effort to overcome our racist ways may only serve to replicate racist relationships, perhaps a little more genteely. Thus tokenism --putting forward one or two people of color in otherwise all-white organizations-- continues to afflict some grassroots groups. Nor should we lose sight of the much larger universe of unorganized people who have no framework at all for close cooperation across ethnic lines.

Just one example of hundreds or thousands you and I could come up with: when I was teaching English to immigrants, all my colleagues were fiercely dedicated to their students. Some went on overseas missions every year. So we had daily contact with communities under attack. None of us, probably, would admit to any prejudice against immigrants. No doubt we would bitterly resist any such accusation, and reject out of hand the accuser. And yet half or more of us supported politicians whose program amounts to ethnic cleansing. Working closely with folks does not in itself guarantee that we shed our biases. Indeed, it may instead reinforce our sense of superiority.

Nor do appeals to compassion and brotherly love get very far among folks who depend on race distinctions for their own self worth. People who don't even like themselves have little mercy to spare for others.

So we can't put all the burden for fixing racism on building personal relationships. We have to confront racism in a direct, deliberate and sustained way. That said, there are more and less effective ways to do so.

● There is another kind of response we often employ. For some of us, the hurts of racism are so urgent and foundational, so long unaddressed, that we must wipe it from our organizations and community before we can tackle other issues. But this too carries risks, of halting the search for common ground, breaking down hard-earned trust and making it more valuable to work with the usual suspects than to reach out to the larger community.

Our most urgent task is to protect those on the front line, by confronting head-on the pundits, preachers and politicians who promote, incite and exploit racist attacks, policies and institutions. In the long run, though, I know that the best protection for us all is a strong majority committed to democracy, which requires engagement as well as conflict.

In biology, I read, there are two tendencies for classifying species: the lumpers and the splitters. That is, some taxonomists prefer to assign separate names to groups based on very small differences, whereas others see these differences as natural variation within a single group. Politically, I'm more of a lumper. As a rich old white guy, it's relatively easy for me to say, Make room for allies. It's also the best strategy.

engage the neighbors, expand the democratic base

The people who promote and profit by racism also attack us by many other means. To fight racism, and not incidentally these other crimes, we need the broadest possible coalition of all those harmed by the racists. Again, we need to engage folks who should be our allies and are not, yet.

● Recognize our personal experience of racial conflict, and offer a better framework for understanding it. Professional class suburban liberals should not be dismissing out of hand the fears of white people in low income schools and neighborhoods, and in low wage jobs. People of color are not the only ones hurt by the racist divides in our communities. Bad policy, including deliberately racist policy, sets us into competition with each other. We can help put these experiences in context, and help call out the bosses responsible.

● Ditch the class contempt so prevalent when white people talk about racism, and the lie that white anti-racists are interested only in helping the less fortunate. We help others in order to help ourselves, and if we do not understand why, we can't explain it to others.

● Acknowedge the cognitive functions of categorizing and generalizations. Racism and related bigotries are favorite tools of ambitious politicians in part because we are by nature disposed to bias. Our brains are wired to develop categories and draw conclusions from the overwhelming but imperfect and confusing information environment. This ability to generalize has served us well for a million years. But it can poison us as we come to depend on culture and mass media much more than procedural knowing and personal experience to mediate the world for us. Now we have all these additional filters between ourselves and reality.

Leftist types tell us that we are all biased in one way or another, and that institutional racism is the killer, much more than personal bias, but nevertheless do not often acknowledge that bias is built into the way we think. To be told, We are all racist, is not a very useful observation; we all think largely in terms of stereotypes, because that's how our brain works. It doesn't tell us much about racism as a politcal force. So we continue to have trouble helping each other distinguish among useful but incomplete generalizations, false stereotypes, the fear and hatred our biases sometimes generate, and the effects of discriminatory language, policy and institutions on target communities and society at large.

It's important to understand this because so many of us see racism as primarily a matter of personal prejudice, and any talk of racism as an attack on ourselves. We have got to overcome this tendency to shut down defensively and dismiss the topic out of hand.

Ignorance is the human condition, but, as with gravity, we fight it every day. None of us know enough. What's not acceptable is to cling to prejudice, to wallow in it without trying to increase our knowledge, and to make lasting judgments about other people without talking with them. So we can demand of each other that we tell the truth, and attend to the process of finding it. When folks recite stereotypes --Mexicans are rapists, or Mexicans are devoted to their families, or Mexicans ought to learn English-- we should ask, How do you know? and offer alternative explanations for what folks claim they see, and respectfully share truer information when they are flat-out wrong.

● Leave off moralizing.

Bouie reminds us (*Washington Post,* 11-22-19) that inside the racist institutions are racist individuals, and their prejudice causes material harm. It's not just the grind of great impersonal machines, but the daily decisions of employers, realtors and other gatekeepers that rob and disenfranchise millions. He is totally right about all that. For me the question is, how do we fight it most effectively?

I remember my undergraduate days when I was first learning about racism and other infections. After a bit I became adept at identifying racist themes and motives in the institutions and people around me (not, of course, in my own behavior). I found it very satisfying to point out some new outrage almost every day. My classificatory cleverness did not, however, help me understand why people choose racism, or what would move them to choose something else instead. It was important for me to learn to see this crime but my indignation made not the slightest dent in racist structures and practice. Learning to identify racism is only one step in fighting it.

We know the most dangerous racism is systematic and structural. We know personal accusations make people defensive and dismissive. Yet some liberals continue to drift into the personal behavior lane. It's not surprising; we all like to feel superior to others. Not very helpful, though.

It's one thing to challenge the people in power, and the people who get power with explicitly racist programs. Not much ambiguity about the fellers with the swastikas. Hard to mistake the meaning of Make America White Again. We must call out and fight the racism of those who stand behind racist signs, make racism a principal feature of their political campaigns, or profit from racist financial and economic practices. We don't have to talk the same way to neighbors and colleagues as we might to people with more power.

Sometimes we forget how we came to our present understandings. I have yet to meet a person who sprang from the womb with a perfect understanding of injustice-- of millenia of experience by billions of people which we cannot all of us know firsthand. Yet it seems sometimes that is what we demand of each other. Sometimes we come to rely more on accusation than on conversation; Freeman, Ross and others describe the poisonous results.

§ So let's be frugal in throwing around the racist label. Unless we clearly express a commitment to racism, it's hard to know each other's intent, and even harder to help us free our minds. Do we make a deliberate effort to promote racist policy or do we just exploit it for money and status, and fall back on racist stereotypes to justify our ill-gotten gains? Do we pretend we are not racist and take any discussion about racism as a personal attack?

We especially resent outsiders who make a bunch of assumptions about us when they know so little about us as individuals. Liberals lose hard-won credibility and any chance to engage when they call people racist who are not. Remember Yankee scorn for "rednecks" during an earlier phase of the civil rights movement? It was very destructive when some middle class northerners characterized all rural or working class southerners as stupid racists (in the process elevating themselves above any such ugliness). That kind of stereotyping is scarcely distinguishable from racism itself.

Nor do we succeed when we label as racists people who are racist but don't see it and/or won't admit it, even to themselves. That means we haven't done the foundational education work to help our neighbors understand. And the surest way to generate resentment and resistance is to yell at people for being racist when they know no other way to be. It's a lot easier to change practice than to change identity. How do I answer if someone calls me a racist? If I'm not, I despise the person levelling the charge, for their ignorance and unfairness. If I am, and ashamed of it, it does me no good to deny it. I despise the person levelling the charge for exposing me. If I'm proud of my racism I become even more committed to it.

So, first, we can distinguish acts from identity; screwing up sometimes doesn't make us nothing but screw-ups. We don't have to be one thing. We can change. Rather than leveling accusations, we can offer different perspectives, or ask each other to explain. When people say we need to deport immigrants, for example, I ask them sometimes how that would help them. I ask them to explain how denying immigrants jobs, homes and security that the rest of us take for granted is not racist. Fella told me he had to leave Florida because the crime rate there is so high because of immigrants. I said, So you come from a place with a lot of crime? I guess you brought crime with you when you immigrated to my state.

And let's face it. Much as some of us envy our President's ability to yell at people without cost, few of us have that kind of coercive power. I remember one time a guy yelled at county commission for not attending to some issue of discrimination. He said, We'll throw you out of office. Eight people around him raised their fists and cheered.

§ When we come off as holier than thou, we are probably lying, and are certainly less effective, alienating the folks we should want to engage.

§ Maybe the myriad manifestations of racism are perfectly clear to someone just out of grad school. For the rest of us, the world is a lot more ambiguous. When we accuse someone of racism, always and everywhere we better be ready to explain why, instead of expecting it to be self-explanatory.

The confusion drives some sloganeers to the absurd conclusion that people of color cannot be racist, a patent falsehood, and something like a double standard. All the more reason to very clear in our minds and in what we say about racist policy and outcomes as a function of power.

§ Racist politicians pay no penalty when liberals label half the community as racist; such broad accusations serve merely to unify the racists' political base.

● acknowledge the effects of racism in our communities:

Before we talk about who's responsible, let's review the data about what is happening in our communities-- the great disparities in income and wealth between white people and people of color, the disproportionate rates of cop shootings and incarceration, patterns of segregated housing, graduation rates and so on. Racism means mass shootings in churches, families drinking poisoned water, hundreds dying in the desert along the border . . . . These are facts, and mostly plain to see for all except those paid not to. Racism is also a great generator of lies. To discredit the more common excuses, we can check our assumptions by asking questions like, what percentage of the federal budget does AFDC really take up, and who are the main recipients?

Racism harms every community. It's important to know and share that, because, as the Frameworks studies show, focussing on the greater harm to people of color encourages the rest of us to dismiss it out of hand, as if it were no concern to us.

So let's also talk about the costs to the dominant groups-- cut-throat economic competition and the race to the bottom; added costs of policing, health care, education and war; cutbacks in services that help us all but that are attacked as serving only people of color; getting caught in the middle when conflicts intensify; and the less tangible effects of having to serve racist masters, and having crimes committed in our names. Why, in the twenty-first century, do incomes of white people in the Deep South still lag average incomes of the nation at large? It's largely the legacy of centuries of slavery and Jim Crow, which depressed wages across the board. We can't devote so much of our energy to putting chains on other people without chaining ourselves.

● identify racist systems and structures.

There are only a couple ways to explain the disparities we see. Either white people are superior by nature or there is some dynamic of discrimination going on. Why are there disproportionately few black engineers, doctors and scientists? We know plenty of reasons having nothing to do with inherent ability.

We have to keep in mind that systematic discrimination affects personal behaviors as well. When we think about it, there's no way racism could not affect our choices. Some people claim, for instance, that people of color don't work as hard as WASPs. I've seen no evidence whatsoever for this accusation, but if it were true that too could be explained as the reasonable response to the choices available. (Alternatively, sometimes we hear employers praise immigrants as "good workers", i.e. they can be cheated with impunity.)

Some policies purposefully target people of color --grabbing the lands of Native peoples and black farmers, for instance, putting immigrants in concentration camps, missions to southern countries-- but other policies have racist impacts without that being their goal. For example, there are a lot of economic incentives to disinvest from communities already disadvantaged by purposeful discrimination generations ago. After decades of neglect, some of these same communities offer great bargains for gentrifying yuppies, who may regret displacing so many of the original residents, even as they boast of the cool ethnic vibes.

So it's important to resist the idea that racism is no more than expression of personal bias. That leads us to reject the idea that racism is behind segregated neighborhoods and schools, the "school to prison pipeline," the disproportionate location of toxic waste sites in poor and black communities. We expect that institutional racism, if it exists at all, must arise from malicious bureacrats and bankers conspiring to hurt people of color. Those people exist, but usually they do their dirty work behind closed doors. Nor can we easily see, unless we are looking for them, the political and financial incentives, the unconscious biases, and the sheer weight of entrenched practice that keep discrimination alive and growing.

● fight racist practice.

Rather than focussing on other folks' intent, which they may not know themselves, or insisting on their moral failure, we can agree on the real-world harms racism causes, and practical ways to

repair it. Again, let's shift away from talk that causes us to shut down defensively, and toward skills we can learn and actions we can take that will tangibly help all of us.

Where I live the schools wrestle with what they delicately call Disparities in Educational Outcomes, i.e. black kids getting lower scores on average and getting kicked out of school at a higher rate than white classmates. So education activists have pushed for, and partly won, more fair and effective systems of classroom management, and "cultural competency" training, mainly to help middle class white teachers understand low income black students better.

Some activists insist that the core of such training must be teachers learning to recognize and root out their personal racism. To me, making moral judgment the centerpiece of antiracism work is a losing proposition for two reasons:
a) most of us equate prejudice with personal animosity, and most teachers don't feel that way towards their kids, and would respond with great indignation to any such accusation; and
b) it would be foolish to lose sight of the culture, training, stresses and incentives that generate the biases teachers do have, and the massive shortfall in resources, that are the real drivers of racism in education.

This is some of what I wrote then:

> I understand how unfair it is to require that people of color once again take on the burden of teaching their white colleagues. I have to say, though, I am skeptical of the "deep, thoughtful introspection" approach to social change. I know that's only one ingredient. Even so, sounds to me like religion, or therapy. Perhaps our home-grown variety of Socialist Self-Criticism. Militaries, of course, depend on humiliating new recruits to make them more malleable. Sounds like we are to look into our hearts and intuit somehow the damage we have done, before or instead of actually reviewing the institutional mechanisms and visible effects of racism. To me it smacks a bit of abusive men fuming and smashing furniture while their partners try to guess their offense. For sure we can glimpse how much our responses are conditioned by race, class & gender, but I don't think we get there by searching our consciences, any more than fish understand the circumstance of the ocean they swim in. I posit that folks who understand somewhat how bias works have reached that conclusion through dealing with the world, not wrestling with angels. We may be willing to do the confession-redemption thing, but that's not the source of our understanding or commitment.
>
> Teachers and administrators exercise more institutional power than students and families but I suggest they do not always feel so powerful. We take responsibility for our actions only when we see that we have choices, alternatives. It's important for all of us to acknowledge our mistakes but not very likely unless we see how we could have done something better. If we understand that students respond to circumstance and how they read it rather than from some foundational inner malice, how can we suppose that teachers do not?
>
> Let me make a comparison. Bullying is a big problem in some places. We could meditate on how cowardly we have been not to stand up to bullies, how much

bullied classmates suffer from our inaction. Or we could roleplay how to respond in bullying situations, and learn the research about how it changes the whole dynamic when people stand up for each other*, and put in place policies that require specific action and accountability from those in authority. We could talk about how bullying is a threat to everyone, not just those most vulnerable today (which we know; otherwise we wouldn't be so scared to speak out), and how collective action can counter it. Introspection and practice are not mutually exclusive, but I don't think the first automatically changes the second. What brings us to change our ways is understanding how we ourselves will benefit. . . .

So I doubt the practical effectiveness of a process that begins with the demand, Admit it: you are a fuck-up. (In this context, no one is going to mistake the intent of "deep, thoughtful introspection".) 3rd graders or adults, this is not a good starting point for learning, changing behavior or changing institutions.

* Except of course when a patriot cuts their throats.

What I have seen work is to start with the stakeholders and start with what they know. Teachers can ask each other, What do we know about these students? Teachers know a lot. But when we ask, How do you know? it becomes clear pretty quickly the difference between first-hand experience, interpretation, or outright speculation and rationalization. Often in talking about it people will qualify or correct their own conclusions. Other participants can add or amend--that's why it's important to have a range of experience represented. We can ask (or roleplay) from the student's point of view: How might the student interpret what you are doing? And when we get to the limits of our knowledge, and acknowledge it --I don't have a clue why the kid reacted that way-- then it can be useful to have outside experts put in their 2¢ --"Research shows . . ."-- which will be more likely to stick with us because we have asked for it. Most important, people have a chance to revisit their assumptions and rework their interpretations with the support of their community and without being subject to suspicion and accusation. That's what engenders commitment and changes behavior, when needed.

In any case, as I said, an afternoon or several spent on cultural competency can be a good start, but none of it matters unless teachers see how to bring that into daily classroom practice. That's why I asked Dave about the *system* in place at his school for followup. What's in place for support and followup in each school? . . .

Again, we have to deal with our personal racism, as well as institutionalized racism and its legacy, but I doubt many people will take part in more than a token way unless they can see a clear benefit to themselves. I went through some of the anti-racism trainings myself years back, and found them useful because the trainers pointed out up front that racism and sexism are what keeps the creepozoids in power, and that to fight them I need to fight discrimination and, most important from my perspective, the calculations of neighbors and

> colleagues that lead them to suck up to the corporados. Do not expect folks to do a bunch of soul-searching unless we see how it fits into the larger project of reducing DEO and classroom disfunction. I think I can safely say that teachers love tools that help them, and despise imposed impractical prescriptions.

Again, racist practice is easier to change than racist belief, and education is more effective than condemnation. We resist accusations in part because we don't know how to act differently. We may think that bullying vulnerable people, and hanging out with other bullies, is part of our core identity, which we'd feel lost without. When there's immediate danger, we need to fight back right away. Otherwise, it doesn't help to despise the neighbors.

Would you be more likely to respond to an attack on your character, or a straightforward statement about how your action affects me? For instance, I could say, What you do hurts me and my friends, and this is what you can do to stop. Maybe you should know all that already-- are you cruel or just stupid? Doesn't matter. What will get you to change your ways? I don't expect this kind of dialogue to eliminate personal bias any time soon. But over time belief follows practice. We always find a way to justify our actions. Acts of justice cultivate commitments to justice. In the beginning was the deed . . . .

Let's be clear in our own intent: do we want to punish the offenders or eliminate the crime? Do we aim to embarrass racists, delicious as that might be, or change policy and practice? These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but in pursuing the one we can lose sight of the other. Awful lot of racists around, including ourselves. Which goal is more important?

<u>isolate & disempower racist politicians and profiteers</u>

None of this is easy, but we can bit by bit peel ourselves from allegiance to racist politicians, because racism is always associated with other crimes. Once we understand the role of racism in our politics, we can see how racist politicians and organizations deceive us and rob us.

● talk more about the political functions of racism, and how it serves the gangsters by dividing us.

§ Racism is one expression of the impulse to organize, to work as a group. The advantages to racism over other forms of collective action include not having to contribute anything but applause. Organizing by a quality I was born with, or can pretend to have been born with --for some communities it takes generations to achieve whiteitude-- means I belong by definition. You can't kick me out for laziness or incompetence.

Probably more important, people who see no way to curb or control the great violence around them can seek to channel it against others. Racism is a way for the very fearful to say, Hurt them, not me.

Racists may also share the spoils, the homes and jobs of the people they run out of town. But for the rank and file, those kind of material benefits are tiny compared to the wealth and power accruing to racist politicians, or the negative benefit of protection against racist violence.

§ For the bosses, racism is a management tool. It's a common feature of weak democracies, where gangsters dominate most institutions but still have to manage an occasionally noisy 99%. The money launderers, tax evaders, arms dealers, surveillance giants, mercenaries, miners, loggers,

polluters, stock and currency manipulators, all these need the cooperation of some segment of voters in order to win government contracts, control markets, referee disputes, legalize theft, shield against investigations and liability, guarantee bailouts, feed underpaid workers, repair damage to abused systems, invade oil countries, pay for research and infrastructure, and a thousand other tasks of government. Not a lot of popular support for their program of dismembering, roasting and eating children, so they have to come up with some other, more attractive cover agenda.

Racism fits the bill nicely. It promises great benefits to insiders from robbing and killing outsiders, and anoints you as the insider. Doesn't even matter whether such benefits actually exist, so long as we gulp down the rubber worm. Our masters could simply give us a bigger piece of the take --perhaps giving back a hand from the arm they chopped off-- but why should they, when we will settle for fingers on the dollar? Racism is one of the cheapest ways to cement our loyalty to the gangster agenda, while at the same time setting us at each other's throats, so that we cannot challenge the bosses. At its heart racism is the straightforward calculation that I can get ahead by cooperating with some people to actively exclude and exploit others. It's gangsterism with excuses. No mystery.

Most people are not gangsters. You'd think, then, that it would be easy to expose the ways politicians manipulate us and steal from us while we are distracted by fear and hatred. But of course that is far from being the case. So let us recall why many of us identify more strongly with traitorous billionaires than with the people across the street. Much of the essay above discusses this. To reprise, briefly:

--generations of deliberate, minutely detailed and enforced race, class, and gender division, supported in part by the thin privilege accorded to servants who think they belong among the masters

--prevalent networks of patron-client relations between bosses and dependents, that train us to mental as well as physical subordination

--the way corporate mass media glorifies gangsters and the gangster life, with all its violence, selfishness, and hyperconsumerism. The "Donald Trump" character as seen on TV and social media is one example among many

--religious training that demonizes outsiders

--the Stockholm Syndrome, by which abused and traumatized people come to love their abusers.

If racism is a management tool, some of us are more easily managed than others. It helps to be ignorant of other groups, judgmental of people in general, moralizing, rationalizing, loyal to the boss, or all bosses. It helps to believe that the rich deserve our admiration and the poor our disdain, that coercion makes us safer than cooperation.

So we see that racism reflects the suite of authoritarian beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, and we have to fight them all. Racism pervades a hundred issues because it is part of that broader authoritarian spectrum. People who lie to themselves, love their bosses and fear their neighbors, delight in hurting people who can't fight back, don't understand natural and social systems and

think God is on their side while everyone else is out to get them-- these folks will not suddenly foreswear their racist ways while clinging to all these other behaviors.

It is especially disastrous to treat racism as a separate issue when election time rolls around. Of course we have to deal with racism. But when we talk about it as if it only concerns people of color, we make this injustice very easy for gringos to dismiss, or fear, as evidence the politicians don't care about the rest of us. It becomes all about people of color, when really it's about the whole community, and democracy.

● identify those most responsible for racist crimes, and hold them accountable. Dismiss their excuses and evasions. Erode the profits and power they derive from racism; make it a losing enterprise.

Now that we've got a better understanding of the mechanisms of racism, we are in a position to name names. We can see who profits from racism-- not only politicians cruising for votes, but also the rich people who don't want to pay fair wages, or taxes for social services, or who look for defenseless communities on which to dump their hazardous waste, or who need racism-driven military adventures to keep those war contracts flowing.

I'm not a racist! protest these players. But that's totally irrelevant. Doesn't matter whether a billionaire or politician is a committed racist in the depths of his putrefying heart; they just count on the rest of us falling for this age-old scam. Maybe they are not personally prejudiced. Many of these snowy-haired billionaires even fuck people of color, and very gratefully, too. You've heard of division of labor? The criminal class likes to farm out the dirty work. They employ armies of prosecutors, propagandists, politicians and police to do the robbing and silencing. That way the investors can feel beneficent when they give a buck to a homeless person, or set up some new tax-evasion charity. Check out President Trump's warm reception at the 2018 Davos gathering of the global elite. The folks who claim to despise his racism and abuse of women were all very thrilled that he came through on what they want most: the license to evade taxes. And he did it by campaigning and winning on a unblushingly racist program.

What matters about these bigshots is not their intent but the effect of their decisions. If their investment plans, campaign slogans, technology choices or trade policy hurt some ethnic groups more than others, we can rightly call them racist. They are possibly less hateful yet far more destructive than an unemployed skinhead masturbating in some basement with his racist buddies.

The people who profit from racism like to caricature the fight against it as making excuses for bad or foolish behavior by people of color; bleeding-heart liberals coddling criminals. In part it's the same argument as when rightists blame poor people for poor health: Tough luck, you shoulda ate your vegetables. The powerful cast blame on the vulnerable in order to deny their own responsibility. And this argument resonates with the larger community of people who see social outcomes through the moralist lens, ignoring or denying systemic problems.

But democrats are not in the business of making excuses. Quite the contrary, they seek to hold policy-makers accountable for the results of their decisions. Justice workers focus on billionaire investors, war contractors, media moguls and their hirelings in Congress, the churches and universities, because they have the most power. They could make our communities better on a large scale, if they so chose. Let's make sure every family has plenty of educational resources, and

the schools are great in every neighborhood, and every neighborhood is safe. Then we press every kid to do their homework. With equal opportunity, kids can see that their efforts pay off.

In practice, of course, we encourage students to work hard even when schools have no libraries and their neighborhoods generate few jobs. We can't wait for the millenium to push folks to do their best. But we never stop fighting for systemic changes that will make make life better for everyone. We hold accountable the rich people and their yapping pet politicians who slam shut the door to opportunity for all. And when we seek to understand why so many support fascist traitors, it's not to make excuses for them, but to help them free their minds.

● expose the responsibility of racists for the other crimes they commit.

Racism is always associated with other crimes. For the gangster bosses, racism's main function is to serve as a shield to cover their crimes and a bludgeon with which to smash democracy. Just as fascism arose as a specific counter to socialism in Europe a century ago --look it up-- so today's racism is a cover for slashing social services, suppressing voters, and smashing any democratic constraints on the liberty of the Davos class to rape our planet. Consider President Trump and his entourage, and how much bribery, consumer fraud, immigration fraud, money laundering, pollution, self-dealing, and sexual assault they are responsible for. I don't know that they have killed anyone themselves, but for sure their policies do. And they are just a small branch of the loose network of transnational criminals perched atop many of our major institutions. Scratch a racist, most often we find a thief, liar, abuser. I want racism to be as much a marker of fraud as Wall Street.

But again, to address those crimes we must also address the range of attitudes that make us suck-ups. Our President's admirers ask, What's wrong with tax evasion, raping employees, or rigging elections? Lots of people are cheaters themselves, and demand it of their favorite masters. We feel more loyalty to the Godfather than to neighbors and colleagues. We expect robbery, and would rather join the perpetrators than the victims. Ultimately, of course, we end up both. So there's a lot of work to do.

Why bother? Why bother coddling racists? They don't deserve my sympathy or even a moment of my thoughts. Kolhatkar writes of a vicious racist (is there any other kind?) in her family:

> There have been many attempts to explain the economic, racial and psychological motivations of Trump voters, and I have read perhaps almost all of them, hoping that I will be able to relate to, or at least understand, the anger my relative feels and why he finds it acceptable to perpetuate outrageous claims. But maybe there is no point in understanding him or the Trump voters who continue to back a dangerous demagogue. In attempting to understand or reconcile with them we risk normalizing that which is utterly not normal.
>
> We need to cast as utterly "abnormal" the hateful rhetoric that Trump and his supporters harbor and express. Racist claims perpetuated in digital memes and fake news stories, anti-immigrant rhetoric that dehumanizes real people and other related pieces of right-wing propaganda cannot remain acceptable. They embody on a very personal

> level a danger to me, and to the vast numbers of people of color and immigrants like me. We may be related to the paranoid foot soldiers of hate, but we are on opposite sides of an existential crisis, and my right to exist in safety is not a compromise I am willing to make. None of us should be willing to make such a compromise.

I've never been the target of racist hatred, but racists scare me too, because they serve the bosses who threaten my community on so many other fronts. Even so, I don't see at all that trying to understand is the same as accepting or normalizing racism, any more than we study other kinds of criminals to facilitate their crimes. Paying attention has nothing to do with compromise; rather, it offers us the best way to fashion tools to disrupt racist gangsterism. The best prison programs offer inmates classes and counseling and half-way houses to wean them from their dependencies. That's how I see engaging with racists. We got to locate the roots of this crime before we can tear them out. (Sometimes with roots you have to pull gently, to get them all.) As best we can, we have to bring ex-offenders back into the community. Not from charity, but because we need their help; because we are broken so long as they are broken.

For sure, it's easier and less dangerous for people like me to do this kind of work, and even at that it is very hard. Ugly. Not everyone has to do this appallingly difficult rescue work, but some of us do.

In the long run, I think we have no choice. In 2016 sixty three million voted for an overtly racist candidate campaigning on an overtly racist program. Be great if we could dismiss the whole lot with the wave of a fist, middle finger extended, but check out their stories: being told to fuck off is central to racists' narrative of persecution. Committed racists thrive on rejection, to justify their cruelty. When it was professional class Yankees yelling at working class Southerners, a certain variety of racism was driven underground for a generation. Now it's back, literally with a vengeance. Decades of labelling people have made it easier for racists to find each other, and to centralize that crime as a core part of their identity; and of course for billionaires and politicians to find and enroll them in their right-wing gangs. To the extent that anti-racist rhetoric suggests that racists are no more than this particular criminal behavior, it reinforces the racist drawing of lines that may not be crossed, and makes it harder for individuals to defect from this criminal enterprise.

Racists are us and our neighbors. That's the really scary part-- Arendt's "banality of evil". Racist politicians, that's a different story. They are killers, and don't belong in our community. We confront the people who direct racist institutions and policies, and attack their media and tear down their filthy monuments. But the gangster lords have power only because they have lots of suck-ups to serve them.

As for the racist rank and file themselves-- even as we challenge their behavior we should engage these folks, all the time, and not as an afterthought. So much of this work is education, and however satisfying, blanket condemnations are no substitute. In the process, anti-racists might learn something about themselves as well.

We know some racists enjoy hurting people and have no other way to entertain themselves. They have little incentive to change. Do we think that's true of tens of millions? Do we dismiss

tens of millions of drug addicts as too far gone to help? Think of racism as a kind of public health issue. We are racists, but that's not all we are. If we give up on our each other we are truly lost.

As with so many battles, we need to apply both carrot and stick. We can raise the costs of racism, especially for those most committed to this crime, while offering a way out for the casual fellow travelers. We attack the worst criminals while engaging the folks who see little of the profits. Sometimes it will be different teams who take on these different tasks. We need an inside game, engaging potential allies, and an outside game, to make life miserable for the racist kingpins. We want to disable racist politicians but empower each other.

This is an old understanding but one we have to relearn every generation: racism is the right's main tool to divide us. It serves them and their corporate masters very well to set working families fighting each other rather than challenging our bosses. People who prefer democracy work to forge strong ties among all communities, and to expose that deeper division, the one that unites us against the gangsters.

**** Government.**

People in Greece and Italy are famous for dodging taxes, but it's a worldwide problem. We see the unwillingness to support government in lots of places where a big chunk of tax dollars end up in politicians' pockets, where you have to bribe a cop or bureaucrat to get anything done, where there is a long history of foreign rulers sucking the country dry, or where homegrown Romneys and Trumps set the example for stiffing the commonwealth. In addition to corruption, there's the problem of government unresponsiveness and outright incompetence. I thought we'd never again see such sheer incompetence as in the second Iraq war, but then Democrats botched the health care rollout in 2010, ran from their own program, and delivered the nation into the hands of a man of legendary ignorance.

There are places, including some in the U.S. of A., where some taxes do fund services that actually benefit taxpayers. But even these programs come under attack as terrible insults to our freedom. So it's not just the money. And it's not just lousy governments. Corrupt governments serve private elites very faithfully. But even mildly democratic, mildly effective governments threaten the relationships of dependency and domination without accountability that are always the preferred habitat of those who would rule. Mafias, churches and corporations do not oppose government; they need it to further their agendas. It's just the democratic part that sticks in their collective craw.

How about the rest of us? Do we value our government so little that we scarcely raise a finger against the billionaires' assault? I see several elements to antigovernment sentiment:

● Some of us feel that security comes from control and coercion, rather than a sense of community, so we look to government to give us war and prisons rather than clean air and health care. Those especially determined to reinforce the Wall between Us and Them (however defined) emphasize this border-patrol function of government. And it's no coincidence that those who endorse the mailed fist function of government should also express the most fear that government threatens individual freedom.

● Despite their free-market rhetoric, even the Tea Partiers love their interstate highways, home mortgage tax breaks, student loan guarantees, Social Security and Medicare (see Skocpol, cited by Freeland). What they can't stand is the idea that they should share these benefits with young people, or low income people, or people of color. Sometimes their loathing is couched in terms of a concern with fraud and abuse-- Reagan's immortal welfare queen. Seems so unfair to coddle these layabouts, deadbeats and criminals. So, for example, politicians in Tennessee demand that AFDC clients take drug tests, despite the improbability that low income moms take drugs in anywhere near the volume of our fine Assemblymen. Here we find the front lines of the struggle over who belongs and who is worthy, how we share privilege or clutch it tightly, and where our responsibilities lie.

● The most politically successful programs, such as Social Security, cover a very broad part of the community. Other programs set narrow eligibility requirements that more or less arbitrarily separate beneficiaries from those who don't qualify, though their circumstances may be barely or only temporarily different from those who do. Joan C. Williams calls this "a recipe for class conflict" (Kuhnhenn)-- more accurately, a recipe for intra-class conflict, setting neighbors against each other when they should stand in solidarity.

● Too many judges, generals, bureaucrats and legislators have been corrupted by lobbyists and the rich people who employ them. The Reagan-Bush Supreme Court ruled that billionaires buying elections is just a form of free speech. Regulators starved of funds and enforcement powers are told to make nice with polluters and scamsters, to accept cosmetic changes while hiding crimes. The famed revolving door between business and government has become a loading dock, as cabinet ministers drive away with truckloads of loot for their pals. Mercenary spies, having learned their trade in the NSA and U.S. military, hire out to dictators to surveill, harass, and jail dissenters, and paint targets on their backs.

Citizens, too, demand corruption, from fixing traffic tickets to no-bid contracts. Favoritism and self-dealing can become so common, so readily rationalized, so pleasing to the inner circle, as to be nearly automatic and unconscious. Ostensibly public service programs become just another very expensive strong-arm of the kleptocracy.

And having so effectively sabotaged demcratic government, the billionaires tell us, See? Government's no good. Much better to leave policy to the wise, no-nonsense businessmen who have proved their ability by the profits they've been able to hide from the tax collector. We'll take care of you, they say; Just look the other way.

● Some government staffers don't respond well to our needs because of ignorance, excess caution, lack of resources, or from sheer bloody-mindedness. How can we or they make sense of thousand-page laws and regulations, written often as not with little input from the people to whom they apply? How can we on the outside understand the politics and pressures inside these large agencies --the DMV, say, or public schools-- and if we can't understand then how do we influence them? We may come to prefer patron-client hierarchies where at least there's a real person we can go to with our little gifts.

● Likewise, some of us don't really get the economics of public monopolies like power and water utilities, police, and insurance pools, and of public investment such as roads, schools, weather satellites and cancer research. As I write the governor of my state plans to outsource thousands of state jobs, claiming that profiteers can do parks and universities better; he reckons some people will believe him.

● God gave us women to take care of us, not bureaucrats.

● Generations after the battles to legislate food inspection, collective bargaining, insurance for bank deposits, Social Security, Medicare, the Clean Water Act, the interstate highway system, mass transit, trade agreements and hundreds of other government programs, it's easy to take for granted the physical and institutional infrastructure government provides. It's part of the background that we traverse every day without really seeing, like a bridge we don't notice until suddenly we have dropped into the river. Lots of folks were happy to see President Trump shut down a quarter of the government in January 2018; less so a month later, but even then we were driving the roads, getting our Social Security checks, eating more or less safe food.

● We have a confusing record, historically and legally, of where we draw the line between individual rights and the public interest, between responsibility and freedom (or what passes for freedom in this alt-fact era). By what authority does a democratic government regulate marriage and markets, limit discrimination against gay people, women or people of color, and require us to fund schools and health programs? Don't these violate our freedom of choice and freedom of religion? If I want to take the risk of going without auto insurance, or Social Security, a motorcycle helmet, or vaccinations for my kid, why shouldn't I have that right? Why shouldn't I be able to dump used car oil down the sewer, park dead cars in the front yard, and order rocket launchers from Ebay? It's no one's business but my own.

● Finally, the idea that we should pool our resources to benefit the whole community challenges the predilection to moralize problems. If social programs can alleviate crime, poverty and poor health, where does individual responsibility come in? Government assistance smacks of rewarding shiftlessness and sin. We should be charitable, of course, but it's got to be entirely voluntary and personal; there's no spiritual merit in paying taxes to support large-scale assistance. Sending toys and bags of rice to disaster victims is virtuous; funding the ongoing FEMA infrastructure hardly counts at all. I noticed that several of my GED students, beneficiaries of such programs, echoed these complaints, perhaps internalizing the middle class assessment of low income people, and also maybe trying to distance themselves from their less deserving co-beneficiaries.

<u>Talking about government</u>**.**

In the USA, the power of lobbyists and their employers, and the vast resources over which we have ceded sovereignty to a few thousand profiteers, far outweigh the democratic elements in our government. Nevertheless, these oases are precious and worth defending. In a world of globe-

girdling criminal networks, democratic government is our best chance to have a say in the decisions that affect us.

To talk productively about problems and solutions we have to clear away the dense tangles of interest and ideology. It will take many conversations. We can **focus on one or two key issues at a time:**

• The role and primary functions of government.

I had a student who said we pay too much tax. I assume he heard that from a classmate, who heard it from her mom or dad. I asked my student who he thought was paying for his high school, the public housing where his family lived, the bus that took him to school, and the road it drove on. When we think about government, it's easy to take for granted the public services we depend on so automatically that we barely even notice them, any more than we're conscious of breathing.

For rightists, security is the only legitimate function of government-- jailing black men, grabbing oil fields in other countries, like that. For the rank and file to whom this seems self-evident, we might ask, What are you most likely to die from-- a suicide bomber or lack of health insurance? What's the closest threat to your home or business-- hurricane, tornado, flood, or AlQaeda in the Arabian Peninsula? Which has brought you more personal stress, ISIS or a groping boss? Which causes cancer, the Muslim Brotherhood or toxic chemicals in our water supply? I don't mean to dismiss real threats from terrorists and other enemies, but to recognize that there is a much larger range of risks that affect us just as much or more.

While government can't solve all our problems, shouldn't we expect it to help where it can? After all, this is our government. Lincoln didn't say, Government of the billionaires, by the billionaires, and for the billionaires. Government exists to serve us all. And perhaps we can help people dig out from under that idea of government as Daddy with a belt in his hand by reminding each other what else good government can help us with.

In another class, an adult student railed against Big Government, citing the IRS, CIA, FBI, military, and the Supreme Court (an interesting mix). The specific abuse he mentioned was the FBI shootout at Waco, which killed scores of religious people and a few law enforcement people. Then we got to talking about the police, Medicare for his granddad, the Occupational Safety and Health administration, his wife's government job, and the very class he was attending. So it's helpful to remind each other of the broad range of government services we depend on. Could make it a kind of game-- see who can name the most government-related services we use in a typical day, from the time we get up in the morning: water and light from government-regulated utilities, food regulated for safety, coffee via trade and banking agreements, weather reports based on government research and technology, news safeguarded by the First Amendment, meds paid for in part by government programs, the money in our wallets . . . and we haven't even gotten out the door yet. Then we can hone in on what we mean by Big Government. For many of us it means corrupt and/or incompetent bureaucrats. For some of us it means we have to share benefits with people of color.

Draw a circle on the page. Let's say that represents the total government budget. Fill in the part you think goes to AFDC and food assistance. Now compare that with a chart based on the actual figures from last year. What stands out to you? What about programs you belong to, or someone in your family? By way of comparison, we can offer counter examples such as corporate

welfare, including state and local tax breaks, and the obscene bidding wars for the Amazon relocation in 2018.

As for the idea that government is properly a bludgeon to make people behave --watchtowers and razor wire to defend the gender boundaries, for instance -- we might ask, How do you react when someone tries to force you to do something? What happens when you try to force your teen to do something? We could remind each other of the costs and benefits of Prohibition in the 1920s and the drug wars since then, and mass incarceration of black men. Fewer people get lung cancer now because fewer smoke tobacco; how did that happen? (By raising tobacco taxes, restricting places to smoke in public, and aggressive education campaigns.)

• **The economics of public goods.** So how come we don't have several power companies in every town, or several road companies? Why doesn't each airline build its own airport in every city? We have lots of phone companies now, but back when all calls came over landlines, there was just AT&T. This is because it makes no sense to duplicate vast infrastructure for the same service-- in some cases, as with air traffic control, it would be very dangerous. How could companies build competing road systems into your neighborhood anyway? Instead, government provides the service directly or regulates these "natural monopolies" to make sure we all have access, without paying very high monopoly prices.

If competition doesn't function well for some services, it's also true that some services don't function well without very broad participation. Driving to work every day wouldn't be very safe if we took stop signs as a suggestion. One building violating fire codes can endanger a whole neighborhood. Insurance pools don't work if they don't include many more people paying in than make claims. Public schools deteriorate when billionaires Gates, Broad and DeVos divert public funds to their for-profit schools-- setting into motion a spiral that increases the profiteers' market share every year. Unions lose bargaining power when employees can enjoy the benefits and protections of union contracts without joining the union-- exactly as "right to work" laws intend. In Greece, where tax evasion is rampant, staggering levels of public debt triggered a deep depression that continues to this day. And we all pay the cost of any trade wars a president might choose to wage (though some pay much more than others).

The union example illustrates the free rider problem. Many public services are barely divisible. Pennsylvania's main highways are toll roads, and more and more, the national parks charge fees for use. We have to pay to get on buses, of course, but those kind of fees cover at best a small fraction of system costs. It's hard to set up very large systems, meant to serve everyone, and then figure out how to exclude the people who don't contribute. So we get scamsters and free riders who exploit our public services, taking more than they need. We see people jumping subway turnstiles, and we see billionaire developers fraudulently claiming hundreds of millions of dollars in tax incentives meant to encourage job creation in low income neighborhoods. Should we then shut these programs down?

There are also the vital services government must provide because the private sector won't. Now SpaceX, a private company, is building rockets, but for half a century NASA and the Russian government monopolized space flight. That's because these programs cost much more than private investors were willing to shell out, and profits won't accrue for many decades, if ever. Sure, SpaceX makes money now --not necessarily net profits-- largely from government contracts,

and piggy-backed on that half-century of NASA technology. Same with products like cancer research; private companies make money only after the government funds the high-risk basic research that supports all the for-profit applications. Bill Gates didn't invent the internet, that was a government project. The Post Office didn't invent mail, but the Continental Congress established the Post Office even before the Declaration of Independence, because they knew they couldn't wait for entrepreneurs to put together a nationwide postal system. And fifty years after the first reported outbreak of Ebola virus, Big Pharma still won't develop a vaccine until governments guarantee them a profit.

The point is, there are some very important parts of the economy that the private sector is unable or unwilling to serve.

• **The undeserving.** We hate it when people abuse the system, stealing resources from people who really need them. It makes us distrust all government services. What should we require of people who use public services? Not just food assistance or disability payments; how about roads, schools, libraries, the police? What kind of tests should we apply for eligibility? What's fair to expect from beneficiaries in return? And what might be some consequences of restricting these programs? We might also ask ourselves, Who is going to hurt us the most, someone buying steak with a SNAP card, or the guy who raises the price of our meds 10X—and what defense do we have against either? Given how important it is to our own sense of self-worth, we may not be able to dent much our contempt for our neighbors, but maybe we can make more salient the sources of abuses on a much bigger scale.

Critics like Singapore dictator Lee Kuan Yew say broad entitlement programs are stupid, a Western weakness. According to them, government should focus resources on the most needy, and make sure to stigmatize people getting public assistance (Micklethwait 140-1), so they are ashamed to ask for help. The help-yourself model rejects the idea that there is a basic right to food, health care or education, even in very rich societies. Government might offer very limited, short-term help in an emergency. Prosperity is available to everyone who works hard, with only a small role played by such factors as class, health, or changes in the economy at large. People who don't fare well have no one to blame but themselves. Such a program can work well in a small city-state that serves as the hub for international flows of capital, just as gambling works for Las Vegas; even the service staff get a cut. But those floods of money come from somewhere else, draining their communities of origin. Hard to see this as a sustainable solution for the hundreds of millions of people worldwide living on pink-collar wages, or harvesting two-hectare unirrigated farms, or collecting cigarette butts for resale, or selling their children for rent money.

• **The role and capacity of charity and volunteer service organizations.** If Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid stopped tomorrow, would your church be ready to care for the folks losing benefits? What if your community got hit by drought, hurricane or wildfire, like Gatlinburg TN in 2016? Even with an unusually vigorous fundraising effort by Dolly Parton and other donors, in the aftermath of the Gatlinburg fire governments far outspent charities. How did local charities fix the opioid epidemic?

In the late 1980s President Bush the 1st called on churches and other volunteer groups to take on a bigger role in our society. He called his idea A Thousand Points of Light. And how did he

propose these groups would meet their expanded responsibilities? Why, the government would pay them, of course.

● **The caring professions.** How much would you charge per hour to manage meds for a demented person, clean his bed sores and change his diapers? How much have you been paying the women in your family? Do you think they could continue helping without public support?

● **Corruption.** First, we need to acknowledge the magnitude of this problem. We like to think corruption is a feature of failed states and drug cartel kingdoms, but the U.S. ruling mafia is neck deep in filth. Trillion-dollar tax evasions; trillion-dollar frauds that the perpetrators skate away from, indeed get bailed out by taxpayers, as in 2008; the capture of our regulatory institutions by lobbyists-- so common we remark on it when the regulators actually do their job; presidential candidates funded by foreign dictators; our President taking millions from foreign governments through his various enterprises; oil companies and war contractors running our Mideast policy; the hundreds of millions of dollars in dark money flooding our political process in the wake of the Extreme Court's ruling that buying elections is free speech; we could go on. If we made bananas we could join the Association of Banana Republics, and claim its presidency. No wonder so many have turned their backs on this fake democracy.

Second, we need to understand the source of these crimes, and government's roles as enabler and victim. We read about fraud in Medicare and military procurement, and the dark money going to politicians. Who is behind all that? Is it the typical food assistance beneficiary? Who is really to blame? At the same time, who complains loudest about abuses, and what do they have to gain? Are they complaining about cheating individuals, or about needy people receiving services regardless of race and religion?

Above all, we understand that corruption is an inevitable consequence of extreme inequality of wealth. The mega-rich simply overwhelm our system of checks and balances when they can write a few checks to buy cops, courts, Congress and the Constitution itself (see, for example, corporations' legal status as people, voter suppression laws and the Citizens United ruling). And extreme inequality is the inevitable consequence of unregulated capitalism, the distribution equivalent of monopoly production.

We know there are some crooked cops. How should we deal with that? Should we abolish the police? Who benefits when we cut government services?

When business cheats, who can we go to for redress?

● **Incompetence and unresponsiveness.** Ever had a frustrating encounter with a bureaucrat? Were they just throwing their weight around, or trying to cover their ass, or masking their ignorance and helplessness? The slackers and clock-watchers, how do they keep their jobs, anyhow? Have you met any types like this in your own place of business? Do you think everyone is so lazy and careless? What's the best way to deal with the people who aren't doing their jobs, without punishing all employees?

How come bureaucrats stick to the rules when the rules don't fit? What would happen if they just gave me a break once in a while? Where do the rules come from in the first place? Let's take an easy one: after the revolution, we need to set up a new government in Knox County,

population 400,000. How do we write a constitution that allows everyone an equal say in the decisions that affect us all? Even before we get to that, how do we make the rules for electing the people who will write the constitution? How long would it take to set up a new constitution from scratch? Remember, we also have to build in procedures for changing the rules when they no longer work for us. With the best will in the world, democracy is an inherently messy process.

Let's think about specific problems. It might take a long time to get permits to build in a particular neighborhood. Why is that? Doesn't it make sense that we require planning for water and power lines, and fire safety features; that we make sure the project won't cause floods or mudslides, or pollute the water; what we know ahead of time how the project will affect traffic flow in nearby neighborhoods? Where did these rules come from in the first place? How did the system used to operate? Which of these provisions can we streamline?

A fire started at a trash company eight blocks from my home, sending a plume of toxic smoke across three counties. In the aftermath, we learned that the company hadn't paid fines for several safety violations and hadn't paid taxes for years. State law allows communities to foreclose on delinquent taxpayers but only after three years; and the process hadn't even started with this company after four years. As for the damage to residents' health and property, we were told those are civil issues; anyone with lots of time and money could sue. How was this dangerous company allowed to set up in a residential area? Why was it allowed to keep operating despite these violations? The biggest question, of course, is why our laws value one man's property over the health and safety of his neighbors. Part of the answer has to do with individual rights and due process, which we also value.

In thinking about our experience overall, should we give up depending on public services and protections? Are there any government services that we receive fairly effectively and reliably? What can we do when we don't get good answers from the people who are supposed to serve us? How do we influence large organizations, whether governments or corporations?

As for the comparative efficiency of the private sector, let's see now: million-car safety recalls . . . foundering cruise ships rescued by the government emergency responders . . . nuclear meltdown in Pennsylvania and Japan . . . B.P.'s calamitous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico . . . Boeing's lethal patch to a dangerous airplane design . . . Wall Street's 2007 overdose --dying banks saved only by financial Nalaxone administered by the taxpayers-- and many other disasters we don't find out about but have to pay for anyway. These derangements put the bosses themselves at risk, as well as the rest of us, so they can't be chalked up to clever if heartless strategy. Capitalism does not magically invest the investor class with better judgment, foresight or self-discipline than mere public servants; rather, their lack of accountability actively encourages CEOs' risky behavior.

• **Freedom and responsibility.** Ever hear the saying, the freedom to swing your arms stops at the tip of someone else's nose-- ? Lots of times what we do affects other people. When I end up in the ICU because I didn't wear a motorcycle helmet, who ends up paying? Who gets hurt if I keep my kids out of school . . . tap into power lines without paying . . . buy stolen electronics for cheap . . . . ignore fire codes when I build the new home? Where do all these rules and regulations come from? If we don't like a rule, what should we do?

Who makes the decisions that affect our daily life the most? Who hires and fires, who sets the price of food and medicine? Who pours toxic chemicals into the air and water? Who buys politicians by the carton?

Over time the Supreme Court has issued many and conflicting rulings about religious freedom. For instance, we are religiously free to discriminate against gay people but not against people of color. Gay people are allowed to marry but polygamy is against the law. Should we be free to do anything that our religions permit? If not, where do we draw the lines?

● **Patron-client relationships.** There is an alternative to government services. Remember that scene in The Godfather? A funeral home owner asks Marlon Brando a favor, and the Godfather grants it. Think such favors come free? No sirree. As Marlon says, there will come a time when I'll ask you to return the favor. Well, that sounds fair. But how did the Godfather get so much money and power in the first place, that people come to him begging for help? He gets all this by robbing the community on a grand scale. Then he brushes a few crumbs from his feast to keep us scrambling for his favor. The Godfather has no need to distribute favors equally among all his clients, nor do we followers have any sense whatever of share and share alike. Obligation flows only upward. His crimes don't matter compared to our need for a protector and champion, so long as they are directed against outsiders, so long as we feel we deserve only crumbs. Das Führerprinzip, one guy called it-- our need for a savior to worship and obey.

Something else we like about the Godfather-- he may be very demanding, but he never interferes in our private lives, or nags us about private vices, or tells us what to do for our own good. He exploits our weaknesses, and never demands that we fix them. He may be El Patron, but he doesn't patronize us like some do-good social worker might. And he requires of us no sense of responsibility for our fellow workers in the vineyard; indeed, he much prefers we fight tooth and nail. Clientelism is the very antithesis of inclusive, cooperative, democratic society.

The attraction of followership is powerful even for folks at the lowest, farthest reaches of these networks. It's a way of thinking and living. For instance, few are close enough to our President to share his power or enjoy his abuse, but many of us admire and follow him. We need him and love him for the permissions he gives us.

So let's unpack **the elements of clientelism:**

§ We need a powerful protector. Otherwise we are helpless in a world run by gangsters. We see no possibility for fair treatment by the big institutions, or collective democratic action.

§ The boss fights powerful rivals and outsiders, but will protect and reward those loyal to him.

§ There is something very special about me, something uniquely lovable, that compels the boss to choose me above all others to love and reward.

§ At the same time, I know many less worthy than I compete with me for the boss's favor. Because he's got a lot on his mind, he might not always twig to their evil machinations. I could be replaced. So I don't presume to ask too much of him. In fact, I'll settle for minimum wage. I

expect a certain loyalty from the boss, but otherwise he is not accountable to me. No rules bind him. His decisions are none of my business.

§ Likewise, nothing ties me to my neighbor except the person of the boss. Unless the boss rules otherwise, they are my rivals and prey. I owe loyalty only to the boss.

§ The boss is more insurance than the font of all good things, so I don't bother him except in cases of emergency. As long as he gets me that job pushing a broom, or gets Johnny out of jail, or calls the guy about the loan --as long as he responds when I really need help-- he's fulfilling his part of the deal. When times are bad --and that's not rare, in my life-- the boss's help can make all the difference. Otherwise, it's up to me to make my way in the world, to grab what I can. For sure I don't expect or want some interfering bureaucratic nanny that's always up in my business.

§ We expect the boss to be a criminal-- indeed, we say he has to commit crimes to get and keep his power, without which he could not help us. Thus some people shrug off or commend political corruption.

§ It's OK for the boss to rob and kill outsiders, and it's OK for us to help him. Sometimes our complicity is more than just following orders. We like the violence. In one kind of society we are ringed about with prohibitions. We're expected to get along with the neighbors. There are a hundred linguistic and cultural norms we are supposed to follow to limit conflict in our communities. Courtesy, fairness, golden rule, blah blah. So here is another important function of the gangster daddy: he gives us permission to hurt other people. He loves us for it.

Long before religion, long before capitalism, these competitive client networks drove war and slavery, and they still underpin a lot of our politics and political assumptions. How can we counter this destructive way of thinking and acting?

§ We distrust the big institutions for good reason. They are dominated in the U.S.A. by very wealthy people who care about the rest of us only insofar as they can rob us. Those of us who have taken part in collective action, through unions or community groups, know how hard that can be. All-volunteer groups are prone to division. Staffed organizations tend to become ass-covering, unresponsive bureacracies. But I have seen staffed organizations with effective decision-making and lots of member participation, and maybe you have to. We need to keep our existing organizations effective and democratic.

§ The patron-seeking response is a mix of realism and fantasy, and we can highlight the contradictions. Because most of us had good dads, because most of us have been told for years about the good dad in heaven, we join these gangs expecting reciprocal top-down loyalty from the boss. If not for our religious training, we might ask, why would a guy who's gotten rich by robbing and killing other people treat us any different? We give him our loyalty and sometimes murderous services, expecting protection in return. But that's a false expectation.

Once we give up our power, the boss can squeeze us dry and throw us away. Indeed, it would be irrational for him not to. That's how he makes his living. It's not as if he needs any single one of us. There are plenty more suckers where we came from-- and our willingness to settle for crumbs shows that we know this. President Trump, for example, cheated and betrayed investors, partners, employees, customers and constituents his entire career. We need to continue to connect the dots for folks who believe they are magically exempt from the boss's depredations.

There's a further contradiction. Though we know our bosses rip off those other people, we also like to think he's basically a good person, and so will do the right thing by the other good people-- us. The moralist idea is that people are good or bad regardless of their circumstances. For the Protestant capitalists described by Max Weber, wealth reflects virtue. But the reality-based community knows that power corrupts. Even if the rich and powerful did not rob and murder to attain their current high status, they often do once they get there, simply because they can. They get stupider, too, the less they have to listen to anyone else. We don't have to depict every CEO as a monster. We can keep reminding ourselves that, without accountability, they are always very dangerous.

I recognize that making this point is swimming upstream. Many of us are vastly frustrated with the constraints of living in a mass society. We long for a society where everyone else has to follow the rules, bureaucratic and cultural, but we ourselves do not. We despise these limits as "political correctness". We forget that the restraints on our own worst impulses are also the only restraints against abuses of power by our bosses.

§ Let's quit excusing and overlooking corruption by the people who claim to speak for us. This is very hard to do. We have to support NGOs and union members despite the obscene self-dealing of some of their bosses. We need to be able to support good folks even as the conspiracy machines crank up false accusations against them. But we must weed out the people who betray us, with at least as much rigor as liberals have finally begun to call to account politicians who assault women. Corruption is not normal, acceptable or the only way to get things done. Corruption hurts every one of us, and if we don't know this already we damn well better do our homework.

§ We have to put faces to the victims, so that the boss's entourage cannot pretend they don't know. We have to talk about the patronage, bribery, nepotism, discrimination, arbitrariness, destructive incompetence --all the equipment and adornments of client networks-- as the crimes they are.

• Public sector scale and effectiveness, and the consequences of failure.

> "The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do, at all, or cannot, so well do, for themselves, in their separate and individual capacities."
>
> --A. Lincoln, July 1854 (cited in Micklethwait p.64)

Finally –and this is a big thing— we can be thoughtful about what we ask the government to take on. We need strong government to do what markets can't, or can't do well, from policing the

markets themselves, to providing vital services such as affordable health care, education, farm price supports, basic research, large-scale infrastructure, and long-term planning, to coordinating the responses to economic, environmental and international crises. Competitive markets do offer a range of choices for goods and services, within the limits of what can be made very profitable, but of course without government regulation a few enterprises soon crowd out the competition. Nor is there any sign whatsoever that volunteers and charity groups can take up the slack. Go Fund Me pages and free turkeys at Thanksgiving are no answer at all to the massive systemic challenges we face; more often, they justify injustice if not actually intensify it.

More than ever we need strong democratic government to manage collective decisions in a crowded mass society under great environmental and technological pressure. Many of us act as if we still had a whole continent to exploit, where we could trash one place after another and keep moving on. But that hasn't been true for over a century. We are crammed in cheek by jowl with the neighbors, and almost anything we do affects them, and vice versa. Sooner or later you all pay when I rush to the emergency room because I have no health insurance; spread measles because I chose not to get vaccinated; piss in the public pool; wash the dishes with soap laced with antibiotics; cause my home to burn down because I violate the building codes; dump motor oil in the sewers, or spray pesticides far and wide, or release pet pythons into the local wetland; sit in the car with the motor running while I admire myself on social media; pay my employees such low wages they have to rely on public assistance; drive drunk; patronize corrupt companies; eat lots of meat and fish; wear toxic sunscreen while swimming by coral reefs; raise kids who hate and fear science. Sometimes the costs are spread out. They always add up. We can bemoan the loss of absolute individual liberty, but the fact is, anyone who lives in community is always bounded by the people around us. We can treat each other as fences or as gateways.

Even on the frontier, when we had a frontier, people depended on their neighbors. If they didn't like each other, though, it was easier to pick up and move away. Now our lives are tightly entwined with those of people we hardly know. Government is the framework for community decisions, and the indispensable referee. And in a democracy, government may do anything the community wants it to do, limited only by the indispensable individual freedoms that make democracy work. That's why the Founders wrote the Bill of Rights.

Here's the thing, though. **Government also has to work well.** We have many reasons to distrust the corporate bureaucracies that call themselves the "free market", but we know government administrators and technocrats can mess up big-time, too, even some with the best of intentions. I give you, not for free, FEMA in Puerto Rico and Louisiana, and Obama's Obamacare debut, and the generals who said Iraq would be a cakewalk. For do-gooders gone very, very wrong, check out Prohibition, and Herbert Hoover. Halberstam insightfully titled his book about the U.S. war in Vietnam *The Best and the Brightest*-- smart, experienced, high-minded crusaders turned fantasists turned mass murderers.

Where I live, the New Deal spawned the Tennessee Valley Authority, which tamed the river, brought electricity to rural families, and hired union members blackballed from Southern textile mills-- a far-reaching and effective government program, locally much appreciated, until TVA technocrats decided to teach the world how to build nuclear reactors. I recall, too, my colleagues

at a local social services agency: some dedicated public servants, others depressed and scowling time-servers, contemptuous of their clients.

We can see, too, that a proliferation of government services does not in itself guarantee a sense of community. The Enlightenment premises that underlie so much of the liberal and left agenda include the idea that we are the product of our experience; that if we are well-fed and housed we are less likely to need to rob our neighbors. But the very commitment to egalitarian ideals also means that our public services must be to some degree impersonal and independent of how recipients behave. It's hard in any case for bureaucracies to forge the relationships that are as central to our well-being as food and shelter. We can point to a lot of places where people get plenty to eat but are otherwise neglected and disrespected. Look at alienated, sometimes murderous young people in many wealthy societies, and the middle class neofascists across Europe and the U.S. Meeting basic needs is the foundation but not the whole cathedral of democratic society. So folks who aim to reform us would do well to be both modest about their capabilities, and more ambitious about what it takes to build community.

Nowadays, confidence in government has fallen so far that public sector screw-ups are more immediately destabilizing than the capitalist kind. Corporations can more easily afford to piss off their customers than government can its citizens. They have centuries of corporate law to protect them. They can seek out new customers, pay off regulators and/or victims, declare bankruptcy, change their names or rebrand their products (as President Trump advised Boeing, after its design failures caused two planes to nosedive). We expect less of the corporations, and half the time when we are on the losing end of a transaction, we blame ourselves for being so stupid. Sometimes we can choose a different vendor, or sue.

Democratic governments can't so easily shrug off their obligations. Our government claims to serve us, and that's what we expect. Even dictatorships like China's have to serve their citizens sometimes. Especially we expect governments to act intelligibly if not always fairly or intelligently; to follow patterns and processes that we can understand and rely on; to not change the rules on us all of a sudden. We get angry when our government fails us, and rightly so.

We will always complain about even the best government-- it's too intrusive, costs too much, delivers too little. Indeed, complaints are part of what makes the system work. And we have had periods when most people thought the government worked well enough to be worth taking part in. The fact that government --the process itself-- has been deliberately sabotaged over many decades by the Rupert Murdochs and their servants in Congress --dozens of votes to kill the Affordable Care Act just the most visible of many many subversions-- does not make the government's current failures any more acceptable.

And when our personal grumbling or organized lobbying don't budge the policy-makers and their billionaire masters, we have one clumsy tool left: disrupt business as usual, drive up system costs until the bosses squeal. Call it protest democracy, a very stunted version of the real thing. We employ it only when the situation has gotten so bad it's almost beyond repair. This weapon is equally available to democrats and fascists, but over time it favors the latter, because chaos and violence are their natural habitat, and because the squealing bosses will inevitably employ the bully-boys to divide and intimidate the 99%.

(Years ago observers noticed that fascism followed hard on the heels of failed authoritarian regimes in Europe after World War I. The war had severely damaged the authority of the

churches, the old aristocracy, the generals, and the war industries, to the point where they could no longer command society. Crucially, however, they were still strong enough to smother emerging democratic movements. Hitler and Mussolini stepped in to rescue the old elites and reestablish dictatorships with a new mass base. Similarly, I think, now many communities in the West feel abandoned by capitalism without being able to replace it. In the USA, I think of the generations-long conflicts and stalemates over health care, immigration, and budgets; accelerating inequality and submission not only to the corporados we know, but also to the less visible international class of murderous gangsters who pour their looted trillions into U.S. banks, real estate and political parties, crippling our economy and government; and the utter failure to come to grips with new tech and environmental disaster. The cozy consensus that ruled for a while after World War II, that's long extinct, while democratic alternatives struggle to emerge. Many turn to what we love best, the violent man who tells us not to worry, he will take care of us and destroy our enemies. All we have to do is obey.)

So **government failures carry very serious consequences:** not just the lack of particular services, but the loss of trust and broad participation, and surrender to authoritarianism. Half of us hate government so much we knowingly elect saboteurs who have no interest in democracy or even effective government. We need government that doesn't simply take on a lot of tasks, but does them well.

As we think about the kind of government we want, let's keep two things in mind:
1) big government does not necessarily mean democratic government, and
2) labelling some services as public and non-profit does not mean there's no self-dealing going on.

§ Some constraints on effective public service**.**

* Aside from outright regulatory capture, regulators will always be playing catch-up to the hustlers in the private sector, so long as there is a private sector. After Boeing's shoddy patch to a poorly designed system killed over three hundred airplane passengers, the Federation Aviation Administration had to admit that they'd basically let Boeing oversee itself, and certify its own compliance with safety standards. The agency simply does not have the staff or in-house expertise to more than superficially monitor the airline giant. At best there may be only a couple competitors in the whole world who could provide an independent (but not impartial) evaluation.

We saw an even more striking example in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, when Obama hired as fixers the very people who helped cause the crisis. They knew the system better than outsiders could. They saved the banks with our money, and nobody went to jail. Millions of homeowners were ruined, but most people kept their jobs. Had Obama instead loosed some left-wing university economists on the problem, would they have managed to avert a meltdown?

For sure the oversight agencies can do a better job than they are doing right now, but it's hard to see how government at any size could replicate in its own ranks the expertise and experience built up in scores of industries. Inevitably regulators must hire experts from the private sector--institutionalizing the revolving door that keeps agencies too cozy with the people they are supposed to monitor.

* Public administrators are limited by their race, gender, and class expectations and experience. They don't know first-hand what the rest of us need, or how their decisions affect us. They are

more likely to trust their class peers in the corporations than the pink- and blue-collar folks they are supposed to serve. Professional-class social democrats are just as prone to this shortcoming. (When I need reminding that, despite do-gooder virtue and years of grad school credential-collecting, I don't always know better than the rude masses, I need look no further than the eugenics movement, a hyper-intrusive program to rid our nation of stupid people with criminal tendency, i.e. immigrants, single moms, low-income people, people of color. Zealously promoted a hundred years ago by countless scientists, professors, foundations, and some feminists --my homies-- this became the model for programs Adolf perfected a few decades later.)

* Public sector managers and technicians are also insulated by position from the effects of their decisions. Whatever happens, they are not the first to lose their jobs or homes or health.

* Reinforcing personal ambition --spending power is not the only motivator, doncha know-- bureacrats' power, technology and data give them the illusion of knowing much more than they know in fact, and tempt them to take on more than they can effectively manage. Fifty years ago business writer Laurence J. Peter posited the Peter Principle, by which competent employees keep getting promoted until they reach a level at which they are incompetent, where they fester and rot. Institutions can fall into this kind of over-reach as well.

* Even smart and honest bureaucrats are subject to the whims of their political masters. The most self-consciously conscientious can be deadly tools in the hands of less scrupulous politicians. We can find the "good German" in every land.

* Even smart and honest bureaucrats make mistakes, sometimes big ones.

* Even when they make the best possible decision, often times policy-makers advantage some groups over others. Only time can even out the flow of advantage-- if we understand the decisions and trust the decision-makers enough to wait our turn, and if the policies themselves don't keep changing every couple years.

All these vulnerabilities, plus the opportunities for corruption, grow with the scale of government. Consider the European Union, a complex, slightly democratic bureaucracy teetering atop dozens of complex, slightly democratic national bureaucracies-- and the mass revolts it has engendered.

§ Shreds of democracy.

Why don't we cut out the middle managers, and just vote on everything, from farm subsidies to war to climate policy? We have the tech. Problem is, voting is only a tiny part of functioning democracy. Our machinery does not make any easier the deep discussion that underpins democratic decisions, nor the long-term perspective and trusting relationships on which that kind of discussion depends. A hundred years ago, Progressives established ballot initiatives that allow Californians to vote on the pressing issues of the day. The idea was to abolish the dirty deals among crooked pols behind closed doors. But ballot inititiatives turn out to be easily manipulated by narrow interests with lots of money. Even aside from that, single-issue votes allow little room

to consider context, other priorities, trade-offs, and long-term impacts. Thus, for instance, they have contributed to California's massive public debt, and Britain's very messy, very expensive, inevitably futile flight from Europe.

The examples we have of direct democracy come from small towns, from Athens to Florence to colonial New England, in which a high proportion of the well-off male population met together regularly to decide the big issues confronting them. Despite constant conflict, their shared experience and a common body of knowledge gave them substantial common interest. They knew each other and knew they'd have to live together side by side for a long time. And they could feel the impact of their decisions right away.

These conditions are rare in mass society. We still experience something like direct democracy in some workplaces, churches and community groups. But it's a very costly process. Think what it takes just to run a middle-scale cooperative, if it's truly democratic: countless hours of research and debate on the part of its members, on top of their daily production work. The time demands alone confound democracy, as people drop out to tend children or hike in the woods, leaving decisions to the iron butts who outlast everyone else.

So most of us participate selectively in the decisions that affect our lives, and delegate the majority to people with greater expertise and/or stakes in the matter. We don't want to do the work ourselves. At the same time, we don't feel bound by the decisions made by others, except as a matter of convenience. When the public sector comes under attack --even programs we depend on-- we are nowhere to be found. Defending the basic social infrastructure becomes someone else's job.

Certain public programs can expand individual liberty and enable democratic participation -- folks with access to good health care and education certainly have more options and more capability-- but democratic outcomes are not guaranteed by any means. Even programs that grow out of grassroots demands can see participation level off and then drop precipitously. Where I live, the Community Action Agency, a legacy of the civil rights movement, is still going strong. It administers a host of assistance programs for low income people. But it's run by staff with token input by a citizen advisory board. Constituents may freely grumble about the rules and services, but I doubt most of them understand how the agency operates or have any thought of taking action to change it.

So, necessary as the public sector is for many purposes, let us not assume it always adds to our liberty. Government can also be used as a cudgel, depending on who controls it. The Founders were always afraid of this. As it turns out, it's the small-government party that most consistently employs our government as a stick with which to beat women, working class people and people of color.

Can we invent effective democratic structures that will work in a mass society? That's sure not what we've got now.

§ Focus on the most important tasks and do them well.

Democratic government requires broad trust and participation. Government over-reach jeopardizes both. So although we might distrust private corporations, poorly informed consumers or even parents unburdened by the latest social science research, we should think long and hard about the responsibilities we ask government to take on.

Are those functions essential, or can we blunder along without government intervention? Do they address problems too big, intense and long-term for markets and smaller institutions to manage at an acceptable cost? How should we measure success, and change course when we fail? How do we limit the kind of corruption, placeholding, gatekeeping and self-dealing we see in public programs and agencies, as well as in some unions, NGOs, and once-democratic political parties? (Here I refer in mainly to the sclerotic left in Europe. Capitalism has always come first for the mainstream parties of the USA.) How do we counter the tendency of big bureaucracies to create their own atmospheres, blundering along immortally even as they fail in their ostensible missions? In short, how can we make sure mechanisms of accountability keep pace with the scale of the public sector?

For sure we should demand radical transparency from the people who make and carry out public policy. Knowing that big mistakes will catch up to them should help keep the administrators on their toes. But aside from lobbyists, few of the rest of us pay attention until something has gone horribly wrong. And better reporting of the public business will not satisfy or slow the conspiracy-mongers who hate the public sector-- lying is just too profitable.

After the Second World War, Galbraith and others liked to point to the Allies' successful efforts to mobilize their economies for war, as an example of what big government can accomplish. The Nazis achieved this as well. And I think those are useful examples, particularly as we face mass extinctions, pandemic terrorism, the merging of the global kleptocracy, and the transition to robot ecosystems, coming very soon to a neighborhood near you. Couple things to remember, though: the comparatively tiny bureaucracies that managed these great wartime coordinations; and the narrow focus of their work. Waging war, cost be damned, is a simpler task than nurturing an equitable, sustainable, opportunity-rich society. Also, of course, the wartime socialists could jail or shoot anyone who raised objections.

We absolutely do need big government --big democracy-- to manage the truly global problems we face. But having the one doesn't mean having the other. We cannot wish away the risks.

§ <u>An experiment</u>.

There are other pieces of this puzzle, such as the social psychology component of our choices. We may be wired like dogs to a submission-domination social framework. But our decisions are not predetermined. More than other animals we have self-awareness and culture; we can learn from experience and from each other.

In my experience, most people try to be fair. Most people need and want the same things I do. That's why I think democracy can work --haltingly, messily-- despite the truly tremendous forces arrayed against us. Some of us talk about justice and democracy but have no faith that our neighbors share these values. We have tried for decades to defend our communities with the Coalition of the Like-Minded, all twelve of us, and have for decades lost more and more ground. I know some folks already practice the kind of outreach and engagement described here; can we strengthen these efforts?

I don't suggest that we moderate our commitment to democracy in any fashion. Quite the contrary, I think engaging each other on these issues deepens it.

None of this will be easy, not after so much blood under the bridge. I don't see any kumbayah moments on the horizon. I think we can learn a lot. I think the alternatives are really ugly.

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§ Appendix: how our underlying models and assumptions intersect with particular issues.

● abortion.

Some of us see abortion as murder on the scale of the Nazi atrocities, and so of course make it a priority to resist. I don't really understand how Christians see fetuses as people --for many weeks, fetuses have no more brain than a daffodil-- but I begin to see why folks are so intense about abortion. The apparently casual way we kill millions of fetuses a year epitomizes the uncaring amoral world that has turned its back on so many communities. Among other things, fetuses serve as a surrogate for the tens and hundreds of millions of people cast aside by the dominant power structures. We, too, feel innocent, hopeless and defenseless.

We can't ignore the big gender component to this battle. As we've seen, fundamentalist religion is in large part a reaction to changing opportunities for women, and "Much of the rage about abortion reflects a larger anxiety about maternal care. . . . Anti-abortion activists are often explicit in their attacks on what they consider female selfishness" (Folbre p.15). So anti-abortion campaigners contrast traditional moms with women who spurn motherhood, and restore men to the traditional protect-family role.

The issue has moral clarity that, for instance, health policy lacks; we can match every dead fetus with a woman and her doctor, whereas it's much harder to identify the specific legislators, polluters or insurance companies who killed Grandma. The killing of fetuses justifies every response, up to and including killing doctors. And fetuses are ideal objects for our solicitude: they cannot dispute the role we have assigned them.

Abortion mobilizes other attitudes we've touched on, from gender roles and patriarchy to our attitudes toward sex, understanding of social processes, the moral or situational nature of our choices, and how we get other people to act right. We also see a lot of compartmentalization--politicians who campaign against abortion are famously determined to tear apart the minimal social services safety net that helps keep families stable and healthy. Moralizing the problem prevents us from developing practical solutions. For instance, many pro-choice women are determined to educate pregnant women about the full range of options, including pregnancy planning and help to raise kids; it's not abortion they insist upon, but pregnant women's right to choose.

Abortion plays such a big role in our politics because it is one of those issues that seems so cut and dried that it washes away other considerations. Many people who abhor the policies of the racists and the corporados nevertheless vote for their candidates. After all, what sacrifice, shortcut or skullduggery is too extreme if it helps us save babies? For folks most comfortable with a single guiding principle (see intolerance of ambiguity, above), abortion has been a godsend. A century ago the great simplifier was communism. Tens of millions of Christians felt they had to choose between Nazis and the Bolsheviks, and they chose Nazis; as anybody would do.

Here it might help to have some historical and ethnographic perspective. The Bible specifies which insects may be eaten but does not mention abortion. So how did come to be such a defining issue for so many people? This is a relatively recent development, and we can link it to political calculations and strategies at particular times and places. Some early feminists felt that outlawing abortion was a victory for women. The American Medical Association demanded anti-abortion laws as a way of squeezing out unlicensed competitors.

We can also address the way anti-abortionists seem to give short shrift to other important problems, and challenge the idea that their position on this one issue lets them off the hook for all the others. Some "integrity of Creation" Christians try to cast anti-abortion work in the context of a broader vision of justice, but I don't know how effective that has been. Millions of god-fearing men and women vote for politicians who assault women --some brag about it in public-- on the grounds that abortion is a bigger problem.

• **crime and punishment.** We want to know how to protect ourselves from crime. To get to that answer, first we have to figure out who commits crime and why. For moralizers, the answers are easy: bad people do bad things because they're bad. It's part of the control and coercion mindset of people who suspect we're all wicked anyway, and that people not like us (in terms of income, appearance, language, religion . . .), being malicious and crazy, pose a special threat. The moralist understanding doesn't leave much of a range of policy options. We can deport immigrants en masse because, as everyone knows, they are criminal types. Otherwise, moralizers tend to prioritize punishment over prevention, because, short of putting them in prison or the gas chamber, we can't stop bad people from doing bad things. As Benforado puts it, " . . . if you believe in the existence of pure evil, it stands to reason that you will tend to support harsh punishment and view efforts at reforming offenders as pointless" (203).

I remember a couple of my colleagues at the social services agency, both black, joking around about a black kid in his last days on death row. They figured that killing this kid would send a message to other gang-bangers. I myself was a bit skeptical; I don't know how many of these young guys catch the headlines. They seem fairly willing to throw bullets around so I don't know if a distant execution offers much deterrent. Could be my colleagues were focussed more on retribution than deterrence. Diamond has pointed out that revenge is a powerful social force that can relieve some of our fear and suffering.

Those of us with a more situational cast of mind, more attentive to motive and social processes, think about the conditions and policies that favor or discourage crime. For instance, while not everyone abused as a child becomes a criminal, many do; so protecting kids and families now also helps reduce crime later. We know poverty, lack of education and all sorts of other factors, --- while not causing crimes, do contribute to making folks ready to commit crimes-- and to making our justice system ready to punish them. Contrast the drug wars of the 1980s, when we jailed literally millions of young black men, with our current assessment of opioid abuse among older rural white people as an epidemic to which we must devote more health care resources. All of these considerations relate to the question I posed earlier: How do we get people to act right?

Our solutions to crime also depend very much on our faith in the criminal justice system (to which noun does the adjective apply?), which in turn depends on two key variables: how we know anything about the world, and how invested we are in the rules of argument and evidence,

honesty and impartiality. But faith that the rules will bring us at least a rough form of justice gives cops and courts too much credit. As Benforado argues in *Unfair*, his book about criminal investigations and court procedure, it's too easy to misinterpret and manipulate evidence, and to take as evidence what is not. Our stereotypes about people play a scarily big role in who gets tossed, arrested, and convicted, and also in letting rapists walk. To maintain this faith untroubled by dash-cam videos and passersby' recordings we must argue that Eric Garner had it coming-- he and all the other unarmed black men killed by police.

● **economy, environment.**
How we respond to issues of environment and economy correlates of course with our attitudes toward nature and its bounty, the value and reality of our earthly existence, the sources of order and stability, our understanding about how large organizations work and how decisions get made, our faith in economic "laws", "experts" and the next big technical fix, our sense of power and responsibility, how we calculate risk, our distrust of bosses weighed against our distrust of neighbors and co-workers, our propensity for wishful thinking, our ability to rationalize beliefs that conflict with our experience (see the efficient markets hypothesis, the virtues of unregulated trade, and the claim that climate change is a hoax), our tendency to moralize problems (Get a job. Stay optimistic. Curb your class envy. Pay no attention to those hypocritical fancy-pants environmentalists), and our sense of who belongs and whom we can safely ignore.

● **gender.**

> In the Western Christian experience sexuality itself was attacked, degraded as animality and condemned as anti-civilization. The individual was split into two antithetical selves: the spirit and the flesh, the ego and the id. The triumph of civilization implied the triumph of soul over flesh, of ego over id, of the controlled over the uncontrolled, of spirit over sex.
> Islam took a substantially different path. What is attacked and debased is not sexuality but women, as the embodiment of destruction, the symbol of **disorder**. The woman is *fitna,* the epitome of the **uncontrollable**, a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant destructive potential . . . . (Mernissi p.44)

If we fear nature, other people and our own sexuality, naturally we'll want to beat up women and gay people. If we think other people are stupid and easily manipulated, we'll act as predators. If we depend on women to care for us when we're sick and wipe away our tears when we're sad; if we see love as a desperate zero-sum competition; if we believe control and coercion are the basis for order and security, we will worry about growing independence for women, and the economic gains, legal protections and government services that support it. And if we revere power without accountability, the mysterious, unchallengeable Daddy who alone can rescue us from our stupid, sinful, helpless existence --the essence of the authoritarian model-- we invite robbery, rape and murder.

● **guns.** If our status and sense of worth hangs solely from our scrotums; if we feel little responsibility beyond our own household; if we are trapped in an alt-facts universe and ignore

well-understood social dynamics such as cycles of violence (exactly what gun dealers count on and promote); if we are very adept at rationalizing our choices, then we might be inclined to buy a gun, or several.

● **health care.**
Some people ask, Why should I have to pay into government health care insurance, when I'm not sick? In addition to relentless GOP propaganda, and an endearingly childlike faith in their continued good health, I'm assuming that this attitude also reflects a lack of knowledge of social and institutional processes, specifically risk management. If you have a big enough, sufficiently diversified insurance pool, revenues from healthy people paying in should be more than enough to cover the costs for the people who get sick. Everybody gets covered without catastrophic financial risk. If the pool includes only sick people, on the other hand, those people are going to have to pay the full costs of treatment. Makes me wonder how the risk deniers invest their 401Ks.

In contrast, most people accept mandatory car insurance. Possibly the benefit is more direct than with health insurance: somebody plows into you, you want the other driver to have insurance. It's not so obvious that we all end up paying, one way or another, for the people who don't have health insurance --when they go to the emergency room, or lose time at work, or die from preventable causes-- usually at much higher cost than if these folks had gotten treatment early on.

● **immigration.** If we see a huge moral gulf between our own group and outsiders; if we think following the rules guarantees fairness; if we think walls can guarantee us safety; if we see the world as a zero-sum machine, where we can only lose if other people get ahead; if we overlook the violence, poverty and environmental devastation that drive people from their home communities, and the discrimination they face wherever they end up; if we don't understand the cash and political incentives behind criminalizing immigrants (or understand them all too well); if we suck up to the boss while blaming the most vulnerable; why, then, beating up immigrants might be just the hobby for us.

(There are of course purely economic reasons for U.S.-born workers to fear competition from immigrants. Over many decades, immigrant workers have displaced locally-born white and black workers in construction, meat-packing and agriculture, largely because it's easier for employers to cheat workers with few legal protections. Interesting to note, however, that President Trump's most loyal supporters –those who thrill to the President's promises to punish Muslims and immigrants— are of average income or slightly above, and live in nearly all-white communities [Miller].)

● **war.** Personality traits related to risk-taking or the need for structure figure in to our military inclinations, but there are plenty of other contributors. Folks who distrust other people, see outsiders as very different from ourselves, moralize problems, and rely more on coercion than cooperation, are therefore more likely to invest in weaponry than diplomacy. I think it's fair to say that compartmentalization and ignorance of basic social and institutional processes contributed heavily to the bloody failure of the second U.S. invasion of Iraq, from group-think that shut out alternatives, to the lack of follow-up planning, the assumption that the invadees will stick to the

strategies our military is designed to defeat, the assumption that democracy is something generals can decree, the assumption that the Iraqi army --still armed-- would just walk away after Halliburton cut off their salaries, the assumption that, after years of war and sanctions, we could flip a switch to turn the oil fields back on, the ignorance of the sectarian divisions within the country, the assumption that mercenary administrators could run a country without speaking the language . . . . Our Mideast adventures remind us that wars are always the contingent convergence of many political and economic interests, and *always* entail atrocities, mass casualties among non-combatants, and a host of unintended consequences. Presumably generals and diplomats have some acquaintance with these realities, but they serve politicians who can be resolutely clueless.

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